

# Rationality and the variety of language games

GIACOMO TURBANTI

---

## ABSTRACT

One of the most striking clashes between the results of Ludwig Wittgenstein's reflections on language games and Robert Brandom's normative analysis of pragmatics concerns the pride of place granted by the latter to assertional practices. While Wittgenstein believes that there is no privileged language game, Brandom maintains that the game of giving and asking for reasons is fundamental for the possibility of any linguistic practice to be properly meaningful. Recently, Rebecca Kukla and Mark Lance proposed to generalize Brandom's normative pragmatics in order to provide a more fine-grained analysis of the normativity that governs discursive practices. It is a courageous enterprise that challenges the predominance of the cognitive approach in pragmatics by underpinning a different way to understand the notion of meaning. Their proposal, however, requires to take into account many different sorts of speech acts on a par and, by doing so, it is in tension with Brandom's approach. This paper explores the shape of this tension in order to see whether or not a unitary characterization of rationality can be envisaged in Wittgenstein's and Brandom's way of accounting for the ability to deploy conceptual contents in linguistic practices.

---

## WORK TYPE

Article

---

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received:

30-April-2018

Accepted:

15-August-2018

---

## ARTICLE LANGUAGE

English

---

## KEYWORDS

Normative Pragmatics  
Declarative Fallacy  
Discursive Rationality  
Language Games  
Space of Reasons

---

© Studia Humanitatis – Universidad de Salamanca 2019

G. Turbanti (✉)  
Università di Pisa, Italy  
e-mail: [turbanti.giacomo@gmail.com](mailto:turbanti.giacomo@gmail.com)

Disputatio. Philosophical Research Bulletin  
Vol. 8, No. 9, Jun. 2019, pp. 0-00  
ISSN: 2254-0601 | [www.disputatio.eu](http://www.disputatio.eu)

# Rationality and the variety of language games

GIACOMO TURBANTI

## §1. Pragmatism and rationality

 ECTION 43 OF THE *PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS* (henceforth, PI) contains what is probably the most iconic statement in Wittgenstein's late work: "the meaning of a word is its use in the language". Thrown into the fray of the ideal language vs. ordinary language ordeal that is often construed as characterizing the mid-twentieth century analytic philosophy of language, this Wittgensteinian aphorism couldn't but become the leading motto of the ordinary language camp. Wittgenstein's lead, however, is typically hard to follow. Looking back to this statement from the point of view of Robert Brandom's normative inferentialism, Wittgenstein seems to be doing something more and something different than championing the cause against Frege and Russell.

Brandom often looks up to the later Wittgenstein as a reference point for his work. In particular, he does so in order to characterize his own commitment to pragmatism. In this regard Brandom's project, in a nutshell, is to combine a *pragmatist* account of intentionality, with a *rationalist* criterion of demarcation of the linguistic or, as he prefers to say, the *discursive*. Brandom correctly attributes to Wittgenstein the former but not the latter idea. However, the reasons why Brandom's rationalism is not to be considered Wittgensteinian need to be analysed with some care. Thus, in this section, I will recollect some very well-known and I assume rather indisputably characteristic elements of the Brandomian framework. Such a recollection, although possibly tedious, is a necessary preliminary step for the purposes of this paper, because having those elements clearly in mind will pave the way for a better understanding of the views that Wittgenstein and Brandom have on the variety of language games.

Let us begin, then, with the analysis of Brandom's pragmatist account of intentionality. In presenting his pragmatism, Brandom usually builds on the *fundamental* (his terminology) pragmatist thesis that what is to *say* or *think that* something is the case should be understood in terms of what one must know *how* (to be able) to do (Brandom 2000, p. 18; Brandom 2011, p. 65). At its bare bones, this is the acknowledgment of the explanatory priority of the practical over the

theoretical. It is an idea that can be paradigmatically recognized in Dewey's criticism of the intellectualist tradition in philosophy, which consists in understanding cognition as the contemplation of a determined (and therefore stable) content. In this sense, this sort of fundamental pragmatism supports an anti-representationalist stance, that puts into question the semantic grounds of the traditional view according to which inner episodes and their linguistic expressions have content in so far as they are *about* other things in the world. Brandom suggests that the pragmatist approach fosters instead a normative interpretation of intentionality, according to which for something to have representational content is for it to be treated as a representation of something else (Brandom 2011, p. 11). When applied to *linguistic* representations, this view implies that, in order to think and communicate linguistically articulated contents, one must be able to engage in the linguistic practices whose rules govern the usage of the linguistic material that allows such an articulation. From the point of view of fundamental pragmatism, then, the idea that meaning is use essentially consists in the acknowledgement of the explanatory priority of pragmatics over semantics: as Brandom puts it, "semantics must answer to pragmatics" (Brandom 1994, p. 83).

Of course, the most delicate part of this reading comes to the fore exactly when language is taken into account. The problem has to do with the proper characterization of the practices to which semantics should answer. So, for instance, classical pragmatists typically argued for anti-representationalism by emphasizing the continuity between non-linguistic and linguistic practices. Again, Dewey is a paradigmatic example of this strategy. On the one hand, he recognized that linguistic abilities mark a difference between the practices that humans, as opposed to other biological organisms, can engage in. On the other hand, he conceived the problem of explaining the development of language as "a special form of the general problem of continuity of change and the emergence of new modes of activity" (LW vol. 12, p. 50). The problem with this approach is that the fundamental pragmatist who decides to downplay the specificity of linguistic practices runs the risk of obliterating the distinguishing kind of normativity that characterizes the linguistic articulation of conceptual contents. The reason should be obvious. Fundamental pragmatism suggests that, if there is a line between rational beings and non-rational beings, it cannot be drawn in terms of the sorts of contents that they are able to entertain, because these are to be understood in terms of the practices that they are able to engage in. And yet, if there is not even a categorial difference between discursive and non-discursive practices, where is the line to be drawn? The problem, then, is that in this way fundamental pragmatism seems also to imply, together with anti-

representationalism, that there is no line of demarcation for rationality.

Brandom counters this conclusion by proposing a demarcational interpretation of the Sellarsian notion of the space of reasons: rational beings are those who are subject to the force of reasons. He argues that one of the main lessons that we ought to learn from Sellars is that the notion of conceptual content is to be understood in terms of inference and justification. This is of course an anti-representationalist thesis. It is the view that conceptual contents do not primarily establish conditions to map representings into representeds, but rather determine what is a reason for what (Brandom 1988). Now, clearly, only rational beings turn out to be concept users. Thus, in Brandom's famous example, a parrot is not rational because it is not able to master the inferential articulation of conceptual contents. A parrot can be trained to croak "Red!" when presented with a red surface, but it will never be able to treat the utterance of "Red!" as a reason for the utterance of "Coloured!". The difference between practices involving only adaptive responsive dispositions and practices of concept application lies in the fact that only the latter require the mastery of inferential relations among reasons. A reason is something that can be asked and given to vindicate the entitlement to one's commitments. Discursive practices are rational linguistic practices, characterized essentially by being governed by conceptual norms. In order for a practice in which symbolic representations are used to qualify as a discursive practice, it must contain moves to give and ask for the reasons that articulate those norms. This is why, according to Brandom, the game of giving and asking for reasons must be an essential part of *any* discursive practice.

The last step in this recollection of Brandom's approach consists in noticing that assertions are the minimal acts by means of which reasons can be given and asked for. When a speaker makes an assertion, she endorses a threefold responsibility: first, the responsibility to vindicate her entitlement to the assertion (if challenged), by making further assertions from which it may follow according to the rules of the practice; second, the responsibility to acknowledge a commitment to what follows from the assertion, according to those same rules; third, the responsibility to revise her other commitments that may be incompatible with the entitlement to the assertion. This is the normative structure that characterizes the application of conceptual contents (cf. Brandom 2008, pp. 112–114). This is why assertions are the basic essential moves in linguistic practices. This is why language has a "downtown", as Brandom usually says.

## § 2. Expressivism and the downtown of language games

Brandom's conclusion about linguistic practices as having an essential core is incompatible with the description that Wittgenstein gives of language games: “[o]ur language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses” (PI, §18). In passages like these, Wittgenstein suggests that language has no essence to be investigated (PI, §92) and that language analysis, if it has to make sense at all, cannot consist in the reduction of certain language games to more fundamental ones (PI, §§60–64). It follows that no theory of meaning, either semantic or pragmatic, is possible or even required.

Admittedly the two pictures of an intricate medieval citadel as opposed to a modern organized city centre clash harshly with each other. It is important, however, not to be led astray by metaphors here and take a moment to see how exactly Brandom and Wittgenstein disagree on linguistic practices. In particular, I suggest to focus again just on Brandom's Sellarsian characterization of rationality as the ability to play the game of giving and asking for reasons. There are two ideas, it seems to me, that provide joined but distinct contributions to this characterization: a normativist one and an expressivist one. The first, as we have seen, is the idea that, for rational discursive practitioners, the use of linguistic expressions is governed by rules. Sellars himself famously put it by saying that, “linguistic objects [...] are fraught with ‘ought’” (Sellars 1962, p. 212). This is a view that the later Wittgenstein clearly shared, and yet diagnosed with a problem. The latter is a well-worn story, but it is worth rehearsing it briefly in the present context.

As McDowell (1984) explained, in the central part of PI Wittgenstein presents a dilemma between two equally unsatisfactory ways to understand how a piece of linguistic behaviour could be evaluated against a rule: on the one horn, the myth that the content of a rule is a Platonic object that can be immediately grasped by the mind, on the other horn, the idea that the content of a rule is instead a linguistic object to be interpreted in a metalanguage. In the first case, every possible correct application of the rule would simply be made available by unfolding a “superlative fact” (PI, §192) corresponding to its content, but, of course, it is not clear how such an infinite content could be presented to the mind. In the second case, the correctness of any single performance could be compared with the criterion provided by an interpretation of the rule, but the interpretation of the rule itself would be a linguistic object which requires an interpretation, thus generating a regress. Wittgenstein's solution to the dilemma

is that it must be possible to conceive a way to understand rules which is not an interpretation (PI, §201), that one is not supposed to be following an explicit rule in order to be bound by norms, and that, in fact, there is no need for a “sideways-on” (McDowell 1994) perspective from which to evaluate the correspondence between the content of the norms and the practices that they govern. To the contrary, every attempt to give reasons for one’s behaviour sooner or later must hit the *bedrock* of the form of life within which one is acting and in which the very possibility to provide justifications is given (PI, §217).

It is in this sense, of course, that Wittgenstein can be read as drawing a quietist conclusion from his discussion of rule-following: once it is acknowledged that the constitutive question about the normativity of meaning is a mistake, the job of philosophy is done. It follows that philosophy has really nothing to say about what a reason is. Wittgenstein explicitly says that it is possible to act rationally without being able to provide reasons (PI, §211, §289) and that the reasons we have, need not be expressed or articulated in order to provide justifications: “A good ground is one that looks *like this*” (PI, §483), he admits, is often all we are supposed to say. Obviously, this is a problem for the rational pragmatist: if meaning is to be determined in terms of the norms that govern linguistic practices, but these norms can’t be given an explicit analysis, then no theory of meaning is possible. In this sense, Brandom is right in qualifying the later Wittgenstein’s anti-representationalism as a form of semantic pessimism (Brandom 2008, p. 7). And yet, it should not necessarily be construed as a rejection of the normativist stance that contributes to Brandom’s characterization of rationality: the point is, rather, that Wittgenstein would never dream to use it to draw any line of demarcation between linguistic and non-linguistic beings.<sup>1</sup>

As it is well known, Brandom has a different approach to the analysis of the bedrock of justifications. He characteristically understands the problem in terms

<sup>1</sup> Wittgenstein’s remarks on the animal mind in the second part of PI may be read as heading in this direction. The position he assumes there is paradigmatic of the fundamental pragmatism that Brandom ascribes to him. We are reluctant to ascribe certain propositional attitudes to the animals, he argues, because we have no idea whether animals have certain representationally contentful states. We are not puzzled by humans in the same way, because we are familiar with the possibility to talk to each other and *communicate the content of our inner states*. And yet, he points out, «[i]f a lion could talk, we wouldn’t be able to understand it» (PI, II, §327): even if we had an epistemic access to the representational contents of the animal’s inner states, we could not understand their *meaning*, for meaning is use. So, Wittgenstein makes two points here. The major one is that what humans and lions can think depends on the practices they can partake in. The minor point is that certain concepts, as those pertaining to certain propositional attitudes, can only be applied to those who partake in linguistic practices like ours (PI, II, §1).

of the dialectics “implicit vs. explicit” and this allows him to resist the anti-theoretic result of Wittgenstein’s argument. On the one hand, he argues that rational beings can be bound by norms without following rules because norms can be *implicit* in practices, in the sense that the correctness of their performance can be assessed also in the absence of the *explicit* formulation of a rule.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, he develops the expressivist enterprise<sup>3</sup> to “explain how what is *explicit* emerges out what is *implicit*” (Brandom 1994, p. 77), without reducing the former away in terms of the latter. He summarizes the two main elements of this enterprise as follows:

A theory of *expression* [...] is to explain how what is *explicit* arises out of what is *implicit*. In the first instance, it must explain how propositional content (the form of the explicit) is conferred by norms that are implicit in discursive practice —that is, what proprieties of use having such a content consist in. Then it must show how those same implicit, content-conferring norms can themselves be made explicit in the form of rules or principles. (*ibid.*)

What mostly concerns us here is the second of these points. In Brandom’s approach, vocabularies are conceived as expressive resources that allow discursive practitioners to say explicitly what they already do implicitly. The expressive role of conditionals is a very good example in this respect: the assertion of a conditional like “*if A then B*” allows one to explicitly acknowledge the commitment that one could otherwise only implicitly endorse by treating the inference from A to B as a valid one. Conditionals belong to logical vocabulary. According to Brandom: “logical vocabulary is distinguished by its function of expressing explicitly *within* a language the features of the use of that language that confer conceptual contents on the states, attitudes, performances, and expressions whose significances are governed by those practices” (Brandom 1994, xviii–xix). This is to be considered as a definition.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, normative and modal vocabularies also qualify as logical vocabularies: they allow to make explicit, as assertable rule statements, the norms that determine the conceptual contents applied in linguistic practices. The expressive resources of logical

<sup>2</sup> He pays the price for the objectivity of the assessment of those implicit norms with the commitment to a form of objective idealism (Habermas 2002). But this is a story for another occasion.

<sup>3</sup> Brandom’s *rational* expressivism must be carefully distinguished from non-cognitivism in meta-ethics. For the application of a more radical anti-representationalist form of expressivism to the analysis of Wittgenstein’s pluralism about language games see (Price 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Some years later Brandom developed an analysis of logical vocabularies as a specific sort of *pragmatic* metavocabularies (cf. Brandom 2008).

vocabularies allow discursive practitioners to play the game of giving and asking for reasons on the very same rules that govern it. Brandom sees his expressivist project as an essential means to pursue the fundamental pragmatist insight about the priority of pragmatics over semantics and to vindicate the normative character of rationality without abandoning the possibility to provide an analysis of meaning. Thus, the expressivist stance is the second idea that contributes to Brandom's Sellarsian characterization of rationality as the ability to play the game of giving and asking for reasons.

Both ideas are essential to such a characterization. In fact, it is important to realize that the normativity of the practice of asserting wouldn't be enough, by itself, to characterize language users as rational beings. McDowell (2005) nailed this point down with a vivid mental experiment. Consider some Martian anthropologists trying to make sense of our linguistic practices. Let the Martians have ways to communicate with each other that are radically different from ours, but let them also be familiar with the norm-governed behaviour of non-competitive games. Suppose, in particular, that they enjoy engaging themselves in linguistic games just for fun. In this case, they could probably understand that human linguistic actions have normative significances in linguistic practices. But would they also understand that these significances consist in conceptual contents? McDowell doubts it. In particular, he denies that Brandom's normative pragmatics is enough to characterize linguistic moves as assertions *that things are thus and so*.

In his replies to McDowell, Brandom holds fast to his expressivist stance. He points out that his project is not to reduce the notion of representational content, as it is defined by standard semantic analysis, to the significance of performances in linguistic practices, as he analyses them in his normative pragmatics. That is to say, he insists that he is not trying to provide an answer to the constitutive question about the normativity of meaning and that he acknowledges our ability to engage in linguistic practices as a prerequisite for his analysis. What he aims to show is rather that what we do when we think or talk *about* something is already in some sense implicit in what we do when we play the basic game of giving and asking for reasons. In Brandom's perspective, it is because contents are already implicit in discursive practices that discursive practitioners are correctly treated as giving and asking for *reasons* at all.<sup>5</sup> The logical vocabulary of semantic analysis,

<sup>5</sup> McDowell (*ibid.*) attributes to Brandom the intention to *reduce* representational content to pragmatic significance as it is expressed in the inferential relations analysed by his inferential semantics. This is a concern shared by various interpreters (cf. e.g. Lance and Kukla 2010, p. 6). In his replies to McDowell, Brandom also tries to clarify that his expressivism pursues an explanatory rather than a reductionist strategy. He does not aim to substitute the vocabulary of inferential semantics to that of the

then, allows us to talk about those very contents, to articulate them and to ascribe them to each other. In other words, when the expressive resources of logical vocabularies are available, discursive practitioners can play the game of giving and asking for reasons on reasons themselves. The ability to deploy logical vocabularies allows them to adopt a critical perspective on their conceptual contents, a perspective that makes them “semantically self-conscious” (cf. e.g. Brandom 1994, p. 384). Yet, these expressive resources are not fundamental to their ability to play the game of giving and asking for reasons, which constitutes what it is for them to be rational even when the game is played implicitly. Indeed, Brandom has a constitutive thesis about rationality, which is not, however, a constitutive thesis about the normativity of meaning (cf. Brandom 1994, ch. 9).

In his view, rationality is thus both normative and expressive. Both characters are necessary for the demarcation of rationality as the ability to play the game of giving and asking for reasons in his approach. It is this twofold characterization of rationality that motivates the attribution of a central role to the act of asserting in linguistic practices. First, it is by making assertions that discursive practitioners can *give and ask for reasons*. Any move in linguistic practices has significance insofar as it has the potential to modify the normative statuses of the practitioners, but it is only by making assertions that discursive practitioners can endorse and fulfil the specific justificatory responsibility that characterizes conceptual contents. Second, the practice of assertion is necessary for the possibility to make explicit, when the expressive resources of logical vocabularies are made available, the very norms that determine conceptual contents.

Wittgenstein’s quietism is clearly incompatible with Brandom’s expressivist explanation and with the central role that assertion plays in it. Wittgenstein denied both that there is a uniform underlying structure accounting for how linguistic expressions have the normative significance they do and that there is some privileged language game that could express it. This is why the acceptance of a radical pluralism about language games can be ascribed to him. This view is not incompatible with the normative character of Brandom’s criterion of demarcation for rationality: the later Wittgenstein, in fact, maintained that linguistic practices are bound by norms and that the meaning of linguistic performances is determined according to them. Expressivism, on the other hand, is something which he would have taken exception to. That is because expressivism suggests that there is a specific unique sort of content that is implicit in the normative structure of all linguistic practices, that such content can be

representationalist one. In his pragmatist approach, he is interested instead in the explanation of what we do when we apply any semantic vocabulary at all.

made explicit and that it is possible to talk about it. Wittgenstein was a normativist about meaning, but he was definitely not an expressivist in Brandom's sense.

### § 3. Normative pragmatics and the declarative fallacy

In their 2009 volume, Kukla and Lance develop an account of what they call “the pragmatics of the space of reasons”. Their purpose is essentially to elaborate the normative analysis of pragmatics proposed by Brandom. In doing so, they explicitly endorse what has been qualified above as fundamental pragmatism: in particular, the commitment “that intentional mental states are best understood as derivative and dependent upon meaningful discursive practice” (Kukla and Lance 2009, p. 6). However, the way in which they resume Brandom's enterprise is ambivalent.

On the one hand, they think of speakers as discursive practitioners endowed with normative statuses and consider speech acts as performances purported to modify these statuses. Building on these Brandomian materials, they develop the theoretical tools for a finer analysis of the normative features of the linguistic usages that articulate the normative statuses of discursive practitioners. This allows them to undertake the normative analysis of various speech acts beyond assertion.<sup>6</sup> These tools result essentially by elaborating on three distinctions. First, Kukla and Lance distinguish between the *input* and the *output* of a speech act: the former is the normative status that entitles the performance of a speech act; the latter is the normative status that the performance of a speech act strives to bring about. In this sense, they propose to construe a speech act as a function from input normative statuses to output normative statuses. Second, they distinguish between *agent-neutral* and *agent-relative* normative statuses: the former may be held by anyone in the discursive community, the latter only bind specific practitioners. Third, they identify the direction, or “voice”, of a speech act and distinguish between *first-personal*, *second-personal* and *impersonal* voices. The direction of a speech act, as they conceive it, is not a grammatical feature. It rather consists in the way in which the normative statuses that constitute the inputs and outputs of a speech act are held by the addressers and imputed to the addressees

<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately I must ignore their normative analysis of *cognitive* and *vocative* speech acts in this paper. Although it is probably the most interesting (and controversial) part of their work, it is largely tangential to the more general point about normative pragmatics that is discussed here. In fact, I do not intend to ponder here the merits of Kukla and Lance's theory *per se*: as far as the present topic is concerned, I am interested only in the criticism that they raise against Brandom. Thus, I just assume for the sake of argument that their approach is a step forward in the analysis of normative pragmatics (which, in large part, I do believe anyway).

of the speech act.

A couple of examples may help clarify these distinctions. Imperatives, for instance, turn out to be second-personally voiced speech acts with agent-relative inputs and agent-relative outputs. So, suppose that Rebecca orders Mark: “Close the door!”. The input of such a speech act is just the entitlement to perform it, which depends on Rebecca’s authority to order Mark to close the door. The output, instead, is the commitment to open the door that Mark acquires as a consequence of the successful performance of the imperative act on Rebecca’s part. The act is directly addressed *to* Mark and it wouldn’t make sense as an imperative if it had no one to impute the normative output to.

It is interesting to compare the normative structure of imperatives, in particular, with the normative structure of the declarative speech acts that are performed by making assertions. Consider, for instance, Rebecca stating to Mark: “The door is closed”. In this case, the input is Rebecca’s entitlement to commit to the content of the declarative and the output is Mark’s entitlement to the same commitment. However, both the input and the output are agent-neutral: anyone can be in the position to be entitled to the act, because the entitlement to it depends on the fact that the door is closed and the act is so performed that anyone in the discursive community could (in principle) pick up the entitlement to it. In fact, declaratives are completely impersonal because they really have no normative direction at all: in this example, the assertion is addressed by Rebecca to Mark, but it doesn’t have to be so addressed to make sense as the specific normative function it is.

On the other hand, however, Kukla and Lance criticise Brandom’s choice to give assertions pride of place in discursive practices. Notice, in fact, that in their account the various speech acts have so radically different normative structures that there seems to be no sense in which the declarative function of assertions should be understood as more fundamental than the other ones. In order to see that, consider what would happen if one were to express the normative function of the imperative “Close the door!” in assertional terms. Surely one could try to deploy the expressive power of normative vocabulary and make explicit the input, the output and the voice of the speech act with something like “Rebecca orders Mark to close the door, she is entitled to thus order him and he ought to do it”. The latter declarative roughly *specifies* what it is for “Close the door!” to be the imperative it is in Kukla and Lance’s account. As a declarative, however, it is a speech act with a different normative function. Declaratives cannot be used in place of imperatives, nor does the ability to perform the former seem to be

required in addition to or in advance of the ability to perform the latter.<sup>7</sup> From the point of view of normative pragmatics, declaratives and imperatives just appear as different *tools* to do different things (cf. PI, §11).

Kukla and Lance's diagnosis is that Brandom commits what Nuel Belnap (1989) denounced as the “declarative fallacy”. This fallacy essentially consists in considering declarative sentences as the paradigm for the analysis of language. *Declarative* sentences are used to *assert propositional* contents: the idea that this unit must be the all-around starting point in syntax, semantics and pragmatic is the mistake identified by Belnap. And if this is really a mistake, then Brandom seems to make it spectacularly. In fact, he writes:

[E]very autonomous discursive practice, in order to count as a *discursive* or *linguistic* practice, in order to count as deploying any *vocabulary*, must include performances that have the *pragmatic* significance of *assertions*, which on the *syntactic* side are utterances of *declarative* sentences, and whose *semantic* content consists of *propositions*. These pragmatic, syntactic, and semantic conditions form an indissoluble package, in the sense that one cannot properly understand any of the concepts assertion, sentence, and proposition apart from their relation to each other. This is the *iron triangle of discursiveness*. (Brandom 2008, p. 117, original emphases and underlines)

He even illustrates the point with a figure of the “triangle” in order to be more incisive (*ibid.* Figure 5.1). Although particularly emphatic, this passage is all but uncharacteristic of Brandom's view about the priority of assertion. The mistake would be remarkable also because Belnap himself, after his analysis of the fallacy, refers just to Brandom's (1983) early normative analysis of inference as a path possibly worth pursuing to overcome part of the problem. Belnap makes such a remark even though all the main building blocks of Brandom's normative inferentialism had already been presented at that time (cf. Brandom 1983; Brandom 1984; Brandom 1988). Of course, it is entirely possible that Belnap missed where the enterprise of his young colleague at Pittsburgh was heading to and that Brandom decided to blatantly disregard the admonishment of his elder colleague. Be that as it may, the disagreement on this point between Belnap and Brandom is worth more in depth analysing.

<sup>7</sup> Notice that this situation is all but mysterious for Brandom. He actually makes a similar case for the possibility to translate indexical vocabulary into non-indexical terms. He notices that while the pragmatic significance of indexical expressions cannot be emulated by non-indexical means, it is entirely possible to specify in non-indexical vocabulary what it is that one must be able to do in order to deploy indexical vocabulary (cf. Brandom 2008, pp. 56–68).

## § 4. Is there a variety of pragmatic significances?

To begin with, it must be noticed that the proper connotation of the declarative fallacy is quite elusive. The problem is not just that, by focusing on the propositional content of declarative sentences, one is lead to understand linguistic meaning directly in representational terms and thus to underwrite what Wittgenstein criticized as the Augustinian view according to which what any linguistic expression means is its referent (PI, §1) —just like “Fido” means Fido (cf. Ryle 1949). In other words, the fallacy is not to be imputed only to truth-conditions and model-theoretic semantics. Inferentialists too, who reject both of them, still commit the declarative fallacy insofar as they are not able to conceive anything except the declarative sentences as occurring in inferential relations. The problem cannot even be traced back to the distinction between *sense* and *force*, which Frege drew to characterize two different aspects of linguistic meaning: on the one hand, the content of the sentence that one uses to make an utterance; on the other hand, the sort of speech act that one intends thereby to perform. This distinction greatly contributed to shape the prevailing view about the boundaries between semantics and pragmatics, a view that the Wittgensteinian investigations could hardly put into question even several decades after their publication (PI, §22). Belnap takes exception not as much to the distinction *per se*, as to the way in which it is applied. In fact, while philosophers of language are typically willing to acknowledge various illocutionary forces, they hardly conceive a similar variety of senses. Thus, they usually tend to construe an illocutionary act as the utterance of a certain propositional content with a certain illocutionary force.

All these issues are raised in Belnap’s analysis. His main target, however, is simpler and more radical. The problem with the declarative fallacy is that it creates gigantic blind-spots in the analysis of language. Philosophers have advanced their understanding of declarative sentences by asking questions like: “How should the content of an assertion be represented?”, “What contribution does a composing expression provide to the content of the declarative sentence in which it occurs?”, “What is it that makes an assertion correct?”, etc. But then they have assumed that the answers they found in the analysis of assertions could be valid across the board. Belnap thinks that they should instead begin to raise corresponding questions to account for the specificities of the other sorts of sentences. The way out of the fallacy, for him, consists in recognising *and* analysing the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic peculiarities of the different varieties of language games. As far as Brandom’s normative inferentialism is concerned, the demand that comes from Belnap’s criticism is for an extension of

normative pragmatics to non-assertoric practices. Kukla and Lance are right in drawing such a conclusion. However, this demand can be read either in a weak or in a strong sense. In the *weak* reading, it is the demand for an analysis of how pragmatic significance is determined in non-assertoric practices. In the *strong* reading, it is the demand for an analysis of non-assertoric pragmatic significances. There is a slight but crucial difference between these two readings. What is at stake in the choice between them is the unity of the notion of pragmatic significance. The crucial question, in this respect, is the following one: do linguistic expressions have different kinds of pragmatic significance in different language games?

Notice that if the distinction is thought as drawn from the perspective of an analysis in which the proper characterization of the notion of pragmatic significance is supposed to ground linguistic meanings in normative pragmatics, then Wittgenstein's theoretical quietism might seem to undercut the distinction altogether. In this sense, of course, how to read the declarative fallacy from Wittgenstein's point of view depends on the proper reading of his quietism. Yet, a harsh dismissal of the issue would be clearly in contrast with the very existence of PI, even in a radically quietist interpretation. When Wittgenstein laments that the “*general* notion of meaning of a word surrounds the working of language with a haze which makes clear vision impossible” (PI §5, my emphasis), he specifically refers to the “philosophical concept of meaning” (PI, §2) that singles out the analysis of reference as the paradigm for the investigation of how language functions. In this sense, it may be argued, his quietism comes just as a therapy against the declarative fallacy, a therapy consisting in dropping the analysis of meaning altogether in order to provide a pragmatist investigation of the function of linguistic expressions in the various forms of life (PI, §19). It is easy to show that, in fact, Wittgenstein endorses a strong reading of the fallacy. He is clearly a model for Belnap not only when he compares the diverse functions that words have to the functions of the tools in a toolbox, but also when he notices: “[H]ow many kinds of sentence are there? Say assertion, question and command? — There are *countless* kinds” (PI, § 23).

Numerous sections of PI, that are sometimes construed as motivating and strengthening his quietist stance, actually have in view *that* general notion of meaning. As far as the present discussion is concerned, an interesting example of this are the sections dealing with the idea of “family resemblances”, that Wittgenstein introduces to characterize what the various language games have in common, without committing to any theory about any essence of the language. As is well known, he rhetorically constructs the introduction of such an idea as the reply to an objection: “You talk about all sorts of language games, but have

nowhere said what the essence of a language-game, and hence of language, is: what is common to all these activities, and that makes them into language or parts of language” (PI, §65).

These are intended to be the remonstrances of a logician like the author of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. But they could also be the words of a Brandomian pragmatist advocating her rationalist criterion of demarcation for discursive practices. Quietism, here, is only part of Wittgenstein’s answer: its corollary, so to speak (cf. Brandom 2008, p. 41). The point that Wittgenstein is trying to make is more fundamental than the renounce to the development of a theory of meaning. Indeed, he argues that a unitary theory of meaning is not possible, but the reason for this view is not so much that the words used in linguistic practices have no significance, but that they have different sorts of pragmatic significances in different language games.

Belnap, who is all but a quietist about linguistic meaning, seems to be decisively inclined towards the strong reading of the declarative fallacy as well. He explicitly talks about interrogative and imperative contents. With respect to Brandom’s normative pragmatics, in particular, he argues that the deontic scorekeeping of discursive practitioners should not be limited to their commitments and entitlements: other kinds of normative stances, like “interests in questions”, should be taken into account to understand non-assertional practices. With respect to Kukla and Lance’s position on this point, instead, my judgment is less clear. I have the impression that their investigation tends to waver between the weak and the strong reading. On the one hand, they get behind Belnap in denouncing the declarative fallacy and they identify it in Brandom’s approach. On the other hand, although with their development of normative pragmatics they introduce the tools for the analysis of how the normative structure of various non-assertional speech acts is articulated, nonetheless they never go as far as postulating new *kinds* of commitments and entitlements to determine the pragmatic significance of a speech act in non-assertional language games. At the end of the day, Kukla and Lance do endorse Brandom’s normativist and expressivist characterization of rationality. Therefore, when they underline the variety of language games, they make a Wittgensteinian point, but not for Wittgensteinian reasons.

Brandom directly addresses Kukla and Lance’s criticism in his replies to their article in the collection on *Making it Explicit* edited by Bernhard Weiss and Jeremy Wanderer (Lance and Kukla 2010). Once again his defence of assertionalism is hinged on his rational expressivism. Thus, he insists that the practice of asserting is in fact the “downtown” of language, because any discursive practice (as

opposed to merely verbal ones) must constitutively involve moves that allow practitioners to give and ask for reasons. Engaging in discursive practices, rather than entertaining certain representational contents, is what it is for rational beings to be subject to the force of reasons. This rationalist stance, he argues, is all but in contrast with the analysis of the specificities of the different language games. In fact, he thinks that the refined normative pragmatics developed by Kukla and Lance can be easily “accommodated” in the framework he already constructed in *Making it Explicit*, provided that his rational expressivism is fully acknowledged. If he is right, then the normative features that allow Kukla and Lance to articulate the structure of non-assertional speech acts can be shown to be already *implicit* in the basic practice of giving and asking for reasons. That this can be done for inputs and outputs is quite obvious, since discursive scorekeepers, as Brandom characterizes them, are already able to track how the normative status of commitments and entitlements of any practitioner is affected by the moves in a language game. Consider then the different voices that a speech act might have. As a normative feature to be tracked by discursive practitioners, it must have to do with by whom commitments and entitlements are possessed or imputed to. But then, Brandom notices, the possibility to distinguish between the different voices that a speech act might have is implicit in the ability that discursive practitioners already have to distinguish between the commitments and entitlements they acknowledge themselves and those they attribute to others. According to Brandom, it is the very perspectival nature of scorekeeping practices, which is articulated in a “I-thou” (as opposed to a “I-we”) social dimension, that vindicates the possibility to identify a voice for the moves in a language game.

All this sort of things discursive practitioners are already able to do implicitly when they play the basic game of giving and asking for reasons by making assertions. Of course, they may then develop the expressive resources to perform explicitly the normative functions identified by Kukla and Lance as characterizing various speech acts and various language games. What is essential to notice, however, is that in the expressivist perspective the ability to deploy these expressive resources is not required for the discursive practitioners to be able to distinguish in practice the normative functions that such resources make explicit. This is a delicate point. As it was noticed above, in Kukla and Lance’s account non-declarative speech acts are pragmatically irreducible to assertions. Therefore, saying that the normative function that characterizes imperatives, for example, is already implicit in the basic game of giving and asking for reasons must not imply that discursive practitioners could *give orders* just by making assertions. In fact, certain expressive resources enable discursive practitioners

precisely to do things they could not do without them. The case of the expressive power of logical vocabularies described above is paradigmatic of this possibility. And yet, if Brandom is right in recognizing the normative distinctions identified by Kukla and Lance as already implicit in the basic game of giving and asking for reasons, then the contribution that these distinctions give to the determination of the *pragmatic significance* of the linguistic expressions used to perform non-assertional speech acts must also already be grounded in assertional practices.

But is Brandom right? There are reasons to doubt that his proposal to accommodate voices into his account of normative pragmatics could really be successful.<sup>8</sup> So, Kukla and Lance could try to argue that rational expressivism cannot accommodate their analysis in the framework of *Making it Explicit* after all. What really concern me here, however, are the implications of such a retort. As is easy to see, the viability of Brandom's expressivist defence against the declarative fallacy depends on the possibility to accept a weak reading of it. Only if the pragmatic significance is conceived as unitary, it makes sense to explain how the expressive resources deployed in different language games contribute to articulate the pragmatic significance implicit in assertional practices. Therefore, the most sensible way to undermine Brandom's replies involves the adoption of the strong reading of the declarative fallacy. In fact, rejecting Brandom's defence for the reason that normative features like the voice of a speech act are not already implicit in the basic game of giving and asking for reasons implies that the pragmatic significance involved in non-declarative practices is different from the pragmatic significance involved in assertional ones. The strong reading of the declarative fallacy, however, has some serious consequences on Brandom's normative inferentialism. In particular it jeopardizes the foundations of the criterion for rationality that characterizes discursive practices. In fact, if there are various sorts of pragmatic significance, McDowell's objection applies to them as well: how are they all expressions of reasons and not just normative stances in a social game? It seems that someone who denounces the strong version of the declarative fallacy in normative pragmatics is committed to provide an answer to McDowell, if she wants to preserve the structure of normative inferentialism. Such an answer could take two forms. On the one hand, one could try to bite the bullet and ground the various different kinds of pragmatic significances into different kinds of rationality. On the other hand, one could more conservatively try to introduce a new notion of rationality that could ground the different kinds of pragmatic significance. Both options might be worth exploring, but the paths to

<sup>8</sup> Reasons like those advocated by Habermas (2002), who back then addressed what he saw as the irreducibly third-perspectival account of discursive practices proposed by Brandom in *Making it Explicit*.

be opened, in either cases, seem to lead far away from Brandom's original approach.

## § 5. Normative pragmatics and cognitive pragmatics

For their criticism to be effective, Kukla and Lance must read the declarative fallacy in the strong sense. If they do so, however, they will find themselves committed to a serious revision of normative inferentialism. Is such a revision feasible? Is it desirable? I have to admit that I do not have an argument to settle these questions in one way or another. In this section I will draw a parallel, instead, that may help get a glimpse at the kind of problems such an argument may likely have to deal with.

In effect, the distinction between the weak and the strong reading of the declarative fallacy in normative pragmatics can be instructively understood, I think, as paralleling in some interesting ways the divide between the two parties opposing each other in the great debate between Literalism and Contextualism. This is a debate that has been going on in the philosophy of language for the last fifteen years, in particular since the publication of François Recanati's influential book *Literal Meaning* (Recanati 2003). In a nutshell, the two positions can be sketched like this. Literalists hold that truth-conditions can be ascribed to a sentence quite independently of what a speaker means by uttering it. Contextualists argue instead that the explicit meaning of a sentence is substantially underdetermined by its semantic content and that free pragmatic enrichment is necessary even for the individuation of the truth-conditions that a sentence has when uttered in a given context. Recanati characterizes Contextualism as holding that “*speech acts* are the primary bearers of content” (original emphasis), because, he explains by mimicking Frege’s context principle, “[o]nly in the context of a speech act does a sentence express a determinate content” (*ibid.* 3). Unfortunately this does not offer, as such, any suggestion about how to develop a theory of the content whose primary bearers are speech acts. In fact, Contextualism has often been endorsed as polemical thesis, with a clear *pars destruens* (namely, undermining the literalist thesis), but without an equally clear *pars construens*.<sup>9</sup> The general difficulty on the Contextualist part to provide solid alternatives to the autonomy of semantic content defended by the Literalists has negatively affected the quality of the

<sup>9</sup> Of course, this sort of criticism is seriously unfair to the remarkable effort spent by Recanati and other authors to articulate the contextualist position (cf. e.g. Recanati 2010). However, I think that ultimately my general point still stands, in view of some reasons that I will try to clarify below.

debate, which has progressively tightened on itself and is wearing itself out lately.

By way of introducing the parallel between this debate and the one that could possibly originate from the opposition between the two readings of the declarative fallacy in normative pragmatics, let us focus again on the idea that *meaning is use*. Today, the Wittgensteinian dictum does not speak to pragmatists only. Any modern philosopher of language who looks back at it still faces the challenge of understanding the pragmatic significance of linguistic expressions. However, for those who do not endorse fundamental pragmatism, this challenge essentially consists in drawing the proper boundaries between the semantic and the pragmatic contribution to the determination of linguistic meaning. On the one hand, semantic significance, or *what is said* by an utterance, is construed as determined in terms of the correctness of the linguistic representations that are used to perform the utterance. On the other hand, in this approach, pragmatic significance, or *what is meant* by an utterance, is construed as determined in terms of the correctness of the utterance *qua* linguistic performance. There are two main views about how to draw these boundaries in the semantics–pragmatics interface. These views can be illustrated just in terms of two different ways of taking into account the suggestion that meaning is use.

In a *weak* interpretation, one may take Wittgenstein's claim as ultimately just calling attention to the fact that pragmatic analysis gives a contribution to the determination of linguistic meaning that must be accounted for. One who comes to favour this interpretation might be someone whose candid reaction to the whole meaning-as-use idea is that it just can't be so. If it were, she might argue, how could we use words to talk *about* things in the world? In effect, she could find some immediate support for her view in the fact that the way in which Wittgenstein actually introduces his idea is somehow anticlimactic with respect to the revolutionary impact that many credit it with: in the very same section 43 of PI, he specifies that his definition does not apply to all cases and that the use of nominal expressions, for instance, is better explained in terms of referring practices anyway. Thus, according to this weak interpretation, at a minimum, Wittgenstein would be making the uncontroversial point that words do not have a meaning as an intrinsic property of theirs, but come to have one because they are used to mean something. At most, one could agree with him that philosophers should start exploring how the pragmatic analysis of language may contribute to the account of *what we mean* when we make utterances. This interpretation fits well with the classical semiotic distinction between semantics and pragmatics, as the distinction between the study of language content and the study of language use respectively. In this sense, however, use is precisely what content is not: while pragmatics contributes to the account of what speakers

mean, its subject matter is sharply distinct from word meaning. Gazdar brightly characterized this view of pragmatics with a stark definition: “PRAGMATICS = MEANING – TRUTH CONDITIONS” (Gazdar 1979, p. 2). In this sense, notice, semantic significance has a certain explanatory priority over pragmatic significance, for the latter is to be investigated as a residual of the former.

In a *strong* interpretation, on the other hand, one may take Wittgenstein’s statement at face value as claiming that meaning *is* in fact use. According to this interpretation the analysis of the determination of the meaning of linguistic expressions consists just in the analysis of pragmatic significance. As a consequence, semantic significance cannot be independent from it. This strong interpretation overturns the explanatory priority of semantics over pragmatics. Pragmatics is given pride of place as an account of meaning and semantic analysis is at best credited with the subsidiary role of providing representational models for certain uses of linguistic expressions. The problem with this view is how to provide a proper characterization of the pragmatic significance of linguistic expressions that could be autonomous independent from their representational content.

While a contextualist may be willing to adopt the strong interpretation and proceed to the investigation of how the meaning of linguistic expressions is determined according to the context in which they are used, a literalist would probably be more inclined towards the weak one and defend the idea that there is at least a minimal kernel of semantical significance to make sense of how the contribution of pragmatics could determine *linguistic* meaning. Of course, these weak and strong interpretations of PI, §43 are intended to parallel the weak and strong interpretations of the declarative fallacy. Now, one might be surprised not to find Brandom among the contextualists in this picture, given that he does have an autonomous account of pragmatic significance. I contend that his place is with the literalists instead, who conceive properly linguistic meaning as characterized by a specific nature and therefore unitarily analysable. The appearance to the contrary arises only if the traditional view is accepted according to which the main opposition in the analysis of meaning is the one between semantic significance and pragmatic significance. I am going to briefly argue that the acceptance of this view is not mandatory and that, in fact, it follows from the choice of adopting a representationalist stance with respect to another opposition, which is rather orthogonal to the distinction between the weak and the strong interpretation of Wittgenstein’s idea: the opposition between cognitive and normative pragmatics.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The adoption of such a representationalist stance is possibly also one of the reasons for the

Both literalists and contextualists ultimately rely on the Gricean account of communicative intentions for the analysis of the processes that determine pragmatic significance (Grice 1957; Grice 1968; Grice 1969; Grice 1975). This should not be contentious, but maybe some qualifications are in order nonetheless. According to Grice, speakers have audience-directed intentions when they communicate: they want the audience to produce certain reactions by reason of the recognition of their intention that they do so. This sort of meta-intention is what essentially characterizes communication in the Gricean approach. If a speaker lacks it while performing a speech act, then she is not really trying to communicate but just to influence the audience. Actually, she is not *meaning* anything at all. It is by recognizing the speaker's communicative intention that the audience may realize that she is indeed meaning something with her behaviour —e.g. with her gestures and vocalizations. The recognition of the speaker's communicative intention generates expectations in the audience: the audience expects the speaker to pursue her goals rationally. Therefore, the audience will try to explain the speaker's behaviour along the lines of the traditional analysis of intentional action, i.e. by attributing goals and instrumental beliefs to the speaker. Having recognized a communicative intention, the audience already knows what the speaker wants to achieve. Thus, the crucial step in the rationalization of the speaker's communicative act is ascribing the beliefs to her which can explain why she decided to behave the way she did in order to achieve her goals. If a speaker makes an utterance, the audience will take the speaker to think that such an utterance is the best she can do in order to fulfil her intention. So, for instance, the audience will expect her utterance to be just as informative as required, true as far as the speaker knows, relevant and expressed in the right manner. These, of course, are the conversational maxims that Grice identifies. When a speaker's communicative act seems to violate such expectations, the audience will try to ascribe other beliefs to her which could explain her behaviour anyway. This is how the audience can retrieve the conversational implicatures that the speaker is taken to mean implicitly.

In some cases, these contents are implicated in addition or in place of what is explicitly said by the speaker. So, for instance, if a speaker utters "My lawyer is a shark" she does not mean what the sentence explicitly says: such a proposition is false, for no lawyer is literally a shark. Rather she implicates, say, that her lawyer is cruel, determined and efficacious. In other cases, the implicatures seem to be necessary even to complete the propositional content that is explicitly expressed by an utterance, as e.g. in "There is some milk in the fridge", where it seems that

inconclusiveness of the debate between Literalism and Contextualism.

the right quantity and quality of the milk to be present in the fridge in order for the sentence to be true must be specified by pragmatically enriching the explicit literal meaning. The debate between Literalism and Contextualism largely revolves around the proper characterization of explicit contents: whether they are to be considered as determined by the distinguishable contribution of semantic and pragmatic processes or by essentially pragmatic processes only (cf. Bezuidenhout 2017). According to minimalists like Emma Borg (2004) or Herman Cappelen and Ernie Lepore (2005), sentences have fully propositional, truth-conditional contents that might be exceptionally specified by means of contextual information, when some syntactic constituent specifically requires it. According to a radical contextualist approach like Relevance Theory, instead, the very notion of semantic content makes little if any sense (Dan Sperber and Wilson 1986; D. Sperber and Wilson 2004; Carston 2002).

It is sometimes suggested that the notion of *what is meant* by a speaker has a cognitive or psychological character (cf. Carston 2002), but I reckon this is inaccurate. In Gricean accounts, speakers do not mean what they do because they have beliefs that they manage to implicitly convey to the audience by relying on their meta-representational abilities, but rather because they manage to endorse implicit commitments.<sup>11</sup> Grice's insight is that by making her communicative intention manifest, a speaker entitles the audience to assume that meta-representing her belief contents is what she wants the audience to do. Thus, as Marina Sbisà correctly noticed with respect to conversational implicatures, the audience "is *authorized* to ascribe to the speaker the intention to communicate them" (Sbisà 2007, 126, my emphasis). Along the same lines, Tomasello remarked that "[a] major function of the Gricean communicative intention [...] is to place my communicative act in the public space so that all the norms apply" (Tomasello 2008, 215). In effect, the pragmatic content of what the speaker means is determined in terms of the norms which her communicative behaviour is taken to abide by (under the assumption that she is rational). All pragmatics is normative, as Wittgenstein had clearly in mind. What the distinction between cognitive and normative pragmatics refers to, then, is the account of rationality that grounds the analysis of pragmatics. In the Gricean account, treating someone as rational is meta-representing, ascribing intentional states to her. In the Brandomian account, instead, it is playing the game of giving and asking for

<sup>11</sup> This is true for Relevance Theory as well. The *principle of relevance*, as Sperber and Wilson originally formulated it, is a normative principle: it states that the audience is authorized to treat any act of ostensive communication as optimally relevant for them (cf. Sperber and Wilson 1986, 158). In fact, the explanatory purpose of the principle is to crank a cognitive analysis of how cognitive subjects process information into a normative analysis of how they communicate.

reasons with her. Notice however that if this is true, then in cognitive pragmatics the criterion for rationality that allows explaining how linguistic performances come to have meanings actually presupposes the semantic analysis that accounts for the representational content of both linguistic expressions and the inner episodes that they are used to express explicitly or implicitly. In other words, the criterion for rationality in cognitive pragmatics calls for the fundamentality of representational relations, while the criterion of rationality in normative pragmatics calls for the fundamentality of assertional practices.

The debate between literalists and contextualists conducted in the framework of cognitive pragmatics has shown to gravitate towards a stalemate. On the one hand, the literalists defend the fundamentality of semantic processes for the determination of meanings, but they are at pains to account for the modulation of these meanings in the context of the various language games. On the other hand, the contextualists embrace the variety of language games and the contribution that they provide to the determination of meanings, but they struggle to develop really autonomous characterizations of pragmatic significances that could make it possible to understand them independently of the rules of representational semantics. Now, the risk for the framework of normative pragmatics is to present a similar prospect. On the one hand, Brandom defends the fundamentality of assertional practices for the determination of meaning, but his analysis might fall short of providing an account for other speech acts. On the other hand, those who urge for a development of normative pragmatics that could satisfactorily cover the variety of language games run the risk of obliterating the grounds on which the very notion of pragmatic significance that they employ rests. Getting stuck into such an impasse would be a seriously unwelcome outcome for the debate on Brandom's normative pragmatics.

## § 6. Conclusions

In PI Wittgenstein argues that the general philosophical notion of meaning, whose representationalist gist he himself had distilled in the *Tractatus*, is a myth. The consequences that he draws from this are radical, especially along *two* dimensions. First, whereas the myth suggests that language has a fundamental essence that accounts for the way in which the various ways in which it is used are all contentful, Wittgenstein declares that linguistic expressions have various sorts of pragmatic significance in the various language games in which they are deployed. Second, whereas the myth demands for an analysis of the semantic essence of language, Wittgenstein professes theoretical quietism and the

abstinence from any meta-linguistic stance. Of course, this is all well known. How Brandom's normative inferentialism relates to this picture, however, might be disputable. On the one hand, both Wittgenstein and Brandom share the "fundamental" pragmatist approach to understanding meaning as pragmatic significance. This is the inevitable starting point for any comparison between the two of them. On the other hand, however, Brandom's criterion for rationality is overall incompatible with Wittgenstein's quietism and semantic pessimism. Brandom maintains that being rational is being able to play the game of giving and asking for reasons. This is a twofold characterization: concept application is essentially governed by the rules of discursive practices and primarily made explicit in the assertion of the propositional content of declarative sentences. Wittgenstein agrees with the first normative characterization, but utterly rejects the second expressivist one.

Rational expressivism allows situating Brandom's approach along the two dimensions described above. With respect to the first dimension, Brandom accepts the plurality of language games only in the sense that there is a variety of ways in which the pragmatic significance, which is essentially determined in the assertional practices of giving and asking for reasons, can be made explicit and articulated by elaborating new abilities and new vocabularies. I suggested that thinking of this view as guilty of the declarative fallacy might be not the best way to frame the debate on normative pragmatics. As far as the second dimension is concerned, Brandom fully acknowledges the expressive power of semantic and pragmatic metavocabularies, insofar as expressivism is deployed as an explanatory, rather than reductivist, strategy to account for how meaning is grounded on the norms of discursive practices.

## REFERENCES

- BELNAP, Nuel (1990). "Declaratives Are Not Enough". *Philosophical Studies* 59, no. 1: pp. 1–30. DOI: 10.1007/BF00368389
- BEZUIDENHOUT, Anne (2017). "Contextualism and Semantic Minimalism". In *The Oxford Handbook of Pragmatics*, ed. Yan Huang, pp. 21–46. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- BORG, Emma (2004). *Minimal Semantics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. DOI: 10.1093/0199270252.001.0001
- BRANDOM, Robert (1983). "Asserting". *Noûs* 17, no. 4: pp. 637–650. DOI: 10.2307/2215086
- BRANDOM, Robert (1984). "Reference Explained Away". *Journal of Philosophy* 81, no. 9: pp. 469–492. DOI: 10.2307/2026268
- BRANDOM, Robert (1988). "Inference, Expression, and Induction". *Philosophical Studies* 54, no. 2: pp. 257–285. DOI: 10.1007/BF00354516
- BRANDOM, Robert (1994). *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.
- BRANDOM, Robert (2000). *Articulating Reasons: An Introduction to Inferentialism*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.
- BRANDOM, Robert (2008). *Between Saying and Doing: Towards an Analytic Pragmatism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199542871.001.0001
- BRANDOM, Robert (2011). *Perspectives on Pragmatism*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.
- CAPPELEN, Herman, and Ernie Lepore (2005). "A Tall Tale: In Defense of Semantic Minimalism and Speech Act Pluralism." In *Contextualism in Philosophy: Knowledge, Meaning, and Truth*, ed. Gerhard Preyer and Georg Peter, pp. 197–219. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- CARSTON, Robyn (2002). *Thoughts and Utterances: The Pragmatics of Explicit Communication*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- DEWEY, John. (1925–1953). *The Later Works of John Dewey* [LW]. Ed. Jo Ann Boydston. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- GAZDAR, Gerald (1979). *Pragmatics: Implicature, Presupposition and Logical Form*. New York: Academic Press.
- GRICE, Paul (1957). "Meaning". *Philosophical Review* 66, no. 3: pp. 377–388. DOI: 10.2307/2182440

- GRICE, Paul (1968). "Utterer's Meaning, Sentence-Meaning, and Word-Meaning." *Foundations of Language* 4, no. 3. p. 225–242.
- GRICE, Paul (1969). "Utterer's Meaning and Intention". *Philosophical Review* 78, no. 2: pp. 147–177. DOI: 10.2307/2184179
- GRICE, Paul (1975). "Logic and Conversation". In *Syntax and Semantics*, ed. Peter Cole and Jerry L. Morgan, vol. 3, pp. 41–58. New York: Academic Press.
- HABERMAS, Jürgen (2002). "From Kant to Hegel: On Robert Brandom's Pragmatic Philosophy of Language". *European Journal of Philosophy* 8, no. 3: pp. 322–355. DOI: 10.1111/1468-0378.00114
- KUKLA, Rebecca, and Mark Lance (2009). "*Yo!*" and "*Lo!*": *The Pragmatic Topography of the Space of Reasons*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.
- KUKLA, Rebecca, and Mark Lance (2010). "Perception, Language, and the First Person." In *Reading Brandom On Making it Explicit*, ed. Bernhard Weiss and Jeremy Wanderer. New York: Routledge.
- MCDOWELL, John (1984). "Wittgenstein on Following a Rule." *Synthese* 58, no. 3: pp. 325–364. DOI: 10.1007/BF00485246
- MCDOWELL, John (1994). *Mind and World*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.
- MCDOWELL, John (2005). "Motivating Inferentialism: Comments on Making It Explicit (Ch. 2)." In *The Pragmatics of Making It Explicit*, ed. Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer, pp. 121–140. Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- PRICE, Huw (2004). "Naturalism Without Representationalism." In *Naturalism in Question*, ed. Mario de Caro and David Macarthur. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.
- RECANATI, François (2003). *Literal Meaning*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. DOI: 10.1017/CBO9780511615382
- RECANATI, François (2010). *Truth-Conditional Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199226993.001.0001
- RYLE, Gilbert (1949). "Meaning and Necessity." *Philosophy* 24, num. 88: pp. 69–76. DOI: 10.1017/S0031819100006781
- SBISÁ, Marina (2007). *Detto Non Detto. Le Forme Della Comunicazione Implicita*. Bari–Roma: Laterza.
- SELLARS, Wilfrid (1962). "Truth and 'Correspondence'." *Journal of Philosophy* 59, num. 2: pp. 29–56. Reprinted in (Sellars, 1963). DOI: 10.2307/2023294
- SELLARS, Wilfrid (1963). *Science, Perception and Reality*. London: Routledge and

- Kegan Paul. Reprinted by Ridgeview, Atascadero, (1991).
- SPERBER, Dan, and Deirdre Wilson (2004). “Relevance Theory.” In: *The Handbook of Pragmatics*, ed. Laurence R. Horn and Gregory Ward, pp. 607–632. Oxford: Blackwell.
- SPERBER, Dan, and Deirdre Wilson (1986). *Relevance*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- TOMASELLO, Michael (2008). *Origins of Human Communication*. Cambridge, MA.: The MIT Press. DOI: 10.7551/mitpress/7551.001.0001
- WITTGENSTEIN, Ludwig (1953). *Philosophical Investigations* [PI]. Oxford: Blackwell. 2nd ed., 1958.



#### NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

Giacomo Turbanti is a Research Fellow at the Department of Civilizations and Forms of Knowledge at the University of Pisa. His research activity mainly concerns philosophy of language, philosophy of communication and philosophical logic. In particular, his interests gravitate around Sellarsian themes: inferentialism, the normativity of meaning and the semantic-pragmatic interface. He is also working on modality and substructural logics. His recent publications include the book *Robert Brandom's Normative Inferentialism* (John Benjamins, 2017).

#### POSTAL ADDRESS

Dipartimento di Civiltà e Forme del Sapere, Via Pasquale Paoli, 15 – 56126 Pisa, Italy. e-mail (✉): turbanti.giacomo@gmail.com

#### HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Turbanti, G. (2019). «Rationality and the variety of language games». *Disputatio. Philosophical Research Bulletin* 8, no. 9: pp. 00–00.