Reductionist vs. neo-Wittgensteinian semantics

A recent book by Kenneth Taylor titled TRUTH AND MEANING: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE starts off by asking the reader to take an interest in the question: how can there be contingent statements of identity, given that everything is necessarily identical with itself?” Taylor identifies this as “Frege’s puzzle”, and treats it as an appropriate starting-point for philosophical reflection on language: The puzzle is, Taylor says, “to explain how a statement of the form ‘a=b’ can differ in cognitive content from a statement of the form ‘a=a’. (TAM, p. 2) This is the first of his examples of strange linguistic phenomena that have called the discipline we call “philosophical semantics” or “philosophy of language” into existence. Other examples include the referential opacity of belief-statements, true statements about non-existent objects, and various other familiar usual suspects.

Someone who comes to Taylor’s book fresh from reading either Wittgenstein’s PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS, or Wilfrid Sellars’ “Reflections on language-games”, or Brandom’s MAKING IT EXPLICIT may balk at the idea that these are strange phenomena in
need of explanation. They may feel that Taylor gets philosophy of
language on a wrong, question-begging, foot. The same reaction is likely
to be found in someone fresh from reading Donald Davidson's later
dissertations (“A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs” or “The Structure and
Content of Truth”, for example). In these papers, little is heard of the
so-called “Davidson program”—the attempt to find extensionalist ways
of paraphrasing intensional statements. Much is heard, however, of the
need to stop thinking of linguistic expressions as representations, and to
remember Quine’s strictures against the existence of entities called
“meanings” or “intensions”. Anyone suspicious of those notions will be
suspicious of Taylor’s use of terms like “cognitive content” or
“representational content” as primitive terms.

Someone fresh from reading either Wittgenstein or the three
neo-Wittgensteinian philosophers of language I have mentioned may
react to Taylor’s description of “Frege’s puzzle” by recalling a passage
in PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS that says that there is no
finer example of a useless sentence than ‘A thing is identical with itself’
(sec. 225). Wittgenstein mockingly compares this sentence to “Every
colored patch fits exactly into its surroundings”. This recollection may
lead her to wonder whether the only use of identity statements, at least
in the language-games which are their original homes, is to make such contingent identifications as that of the morning star and the evening star, or the mind and the brain. The idea of self-identity, and a fortiori that of necessary self-identity is one that everybody except certain philosophers seems able to do without. If we agree to abjure that notion, there will be no reason to take Frege’s puzzle seriously. To a Wittgensteinian, the puzzle can hardly serve as a paradigmatic problem whose existence is used to excuse the continued existence of a discipline Wittgenstein himself came to think we could do without—the philosophy of language.

A reader of this sort is also likely to balk at Taylor’s invocation of Church’s translation test. Taylor explains that Church criticized Frege’s solution to his puzzle by invoking two plausible principles:

(1) The Paraphrase Principle: A sentence S’ is an adequate paraphrase of a sentence S iff what S’ expresses is identical to what S expresses

(2) The Translation Principle: If T is an adequate translation of S then T expresses what S expresses.

Church pressed these principles home by noting that if

‘The morning star’ denotes the same object as ‘the evening star’.
were an adequate paraphrase of

   The morning star is the evening star.

Then the German translation of the latter sentence should express just what the translation of the former does. But it does not, for

   ‘The morning star’ and ‘the evening star’ bedeutet der gleichen Gegenstand.

does not express the same thing as is expressed by

   Der Morgenstern ist der Abendstern.

   Someone steeped in Wittgenstein, Sellars, the later Davidson, or Brandom is likely to protest at this point that the notion of “expressing the same as” is no more useful than that of self-identity. She of course agrees that two different sentences can, sometimes, in certain contexts, be used interchangeably. But for reasons like those which led Quine to mock the notion of synonomy, she is dubious about the idea that one can seek out a sentence that means, tout court, regardless of context, the same thing as another sentence... She is dubious, in short about both the notion of “finding the meaning” as opposed to finding various uses, and about the notion of something that sentences express, or that makes them true, in every possible context. Having been led by Davidson to be suspicious of the notion that truths are representations of reality, she
may wonder whether non-contextual use of “expresses the same thing as” may not be as dubious and dispensable a locution as “represents the same bit of reality”.

Again, having been led by Brandom to neglect the context-free question “what does this sentence represent?” in favor of the context-ridden question “what deontic score will be chalked up against an utterer of the sentence by a certain person in a certain situation?”, this person may be inclined to remark that it is hard to see in which situation what sort of person could given an utterance of

(S) The morning star is the evening star

a different score than an utterance of

(S’) The thing we anglophones call ‘the morning star’ and what we call ‘the evening star’ are the same star.

or of

(S’’) ‘The morning star’ and ‘the evening star’ denote the same object.

For the only differential scoring she can envisage is one which results from a situation in which somebody is prepared to infer something from one of these sentences that somebody else is not. That situation, she
suspects, is only going to arise within a special, rather dubious, area of culture—the philosophy of language.

Only there will some people say that the representational contents of utterances of these sentences vary, or that they are made true by different bits of reality, for only do we find uses for terms like “denote”, “object”, “is made true by”, and “expresses the same as”. Within that area of culture, of course, no appeal to common-sense usage will be admitted, any more than in would have been in 17th-century discussions of whether and how to use terms like “natural motion”, “violent motion”, “quantity of motion”, “inertia”, and the like. So, once again, the question raised for Wittgensteinians, Brandomians and the like is: Is philosophy of language an area of culture in which language has simply gone on holiday, or one in which real problems are being addressed with the help of an appropriately technical and non-commonsensical vocabulary?

This latter question boils down to: what good do we think philosophy of language is going to do us? Are there, as Taylor thinks, strange phenomena that need explanation, as there were in the days when people were debating the relative utility of the terms “natural motion” and “inertia”, or are there, as Wittgensteinian therapists
sneer, merely pseudo-problems created by a picture that has been holding us captive?

Putting the alternatives in this way suggests that we might view not just Wittgenstein, but also Sellars, Davidson and Brandom as therapeutic rather than systematic, constructive, philosophers. This prima facie implausible suggestion has a grain of truth in it. For these four philosophers I have just mentioned do have a common target. They are all trying to help us free us from the captivity of the same picture. The fact that some of them do so by offering us large structures of interconnected arguments rather than brief and bracing aphorisms should not obscure the fact that they all see certain problems as unreal which Taylor, David Lewis, Saul Kripke, David Kaplan and many others see as real.

These are the problems which notions such as “intensions’ and “meanings” are intended to solve—problems created by the claim that the same objects and states of affairs can be described in many different ways. The Fregean idea is that there are things called “intensions” which are finer-grained than the represented extensions, and that philosophy of language seeks to correlate these intensions with the use
of linguistic expressions, and thereby to show how language manages to function as a representational system.

Taylor says of Davidson, in tones of puzzlement, that on his view “meanings play no role in the theory of meaning” (TAM, p. 147). The same remark could be made, mutatis mutandis, for Wittgenstein, Sellars and Brandom. Insofar as these philosophers have theories of meaning, they are not the sort of theories which be used to figure out what a given linguistic expression means. Except for Davidson, they are not in the business of paraphrasing expressions by finding equivalent and more perspicuous expressions, and even in the case of Davidson such paraphrase is incidental to his larger project of substituting an holistic for a building-block account of how linguistic expressions relate to extra-linguistic entities.

Davidson’s semantic holism—defined by Taylor as the claim that “the meanings of the expressions of a language depend on the totality of the relations that these expressions bear one to another” (TAM, p. 175)—is viewed by Taylor as a way of making semantic notions “physicalistically respectable even if there can be no physicalistic reduction of the semantic primitives”. (TAM, p. 176). I shall return to the matter of the reducibility of semantic primitives shortly, but for the
Discouragement with reductionist projects is intensified by reading Wittgenstein and beginning to think that any linguistic expression has a perfectly respectable meaning merely by virtue of having a use, and that any such expression has a use if you give it a use. Despite Wittgenstein’s own dubiously consistent of epithets like “nonsense” to characterize expressions like “A thing is identical with itself”, readers of PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS find themselves reluctant to suggest that that some expressions in actual use lack “a clear meaning”. For without some specific reductionist program in mind, the untranslatability of those expressions into an alternative vocabulary does nothing to show lack of meaning, or lack of clarity.

Although in the INVESTIGATIONS Wittgenstein still sometimes talking about detecting conceptual confusion, for the most part he is content to let a thousand language-games be played without suggesting the need for philosophical supervision. Davidson and Brandom never talk about conceptual confusion or nonsense. This is because both philosophers follow Quine in rejecting the very idea of stable objects which are more clearly seen, better understood, when described in one set of terms, the analysandum, than in another set of terms, the analysans. The price that Quine paid for, as Davidson put it, preserving
philosophy of language as a serious subject, was to cast doubt on both the reductionism which was dear to Quine’s own heart and on the Carnapian idea that philosophy of language could be a tool of culture criticism.

As I see it, contemporary anglophone philosophy of language has split into two camps. In the first, or neo-Wittgensteinian, camp are the people whose favorite philosophers of language are Davidson and Brandom. In the second, or reductionist, camp are the people whose favorite philosophers of language include David Lewis, Saul Kripke, David Kaplan, and John Perry. The latter typically find congenial either the sort of physicalistic metaphysics that Lewis shares with Frank Jackson and many of the other philosophers of Australasia, or the attempt to ground both semantics and epistemology in evolutionary biology that is found in the work of Dretske, Millikan and Gibbard, or both. Were Russell and Carnap were to return from the grave, they would find the work of this second camp more intelligible than that of the first. For their work is continuous with the idea of “the philosophy of unified science” in a way that work done in the first camp is not.

The idea that philosophy can be rendered scientific by carrying through on the sort of reductionist research program that Carnap
envisaged goes hand in hand with the claim that one function of philosophy is to purify culture by getting rid of “unscientific” elements go hand in hand. The latter claim is no longer advanced in the rather crude and sneering tones which were characteristic of Ayer and Popper. But the dissatisfaction that many philosophers in the second camp feel with the work of philosophers in the first camp has a great deal to do with the need to keep something like Carnap’s and Popper’s crusading zeal alive—the need to fashion weapons which will keep politically and spiritually dangerous philosophers (Hegel and Heidegger, for example) at bay.

Another source of their dissatisfaction is that it is hard to envisage a Wittgensteinian or a Brandomian research program in semantics. Neither philosopher offers a budget of unsolved problems for graduate students to tackle in their dissertations. Back in the ‘80’s, it did seem as if Davidson had such a research program to propose, and this illusion had a good deal to do with the enthusiastic reception of his Locke Lectures at Oxford. But in the ensuing years Davidson appears to have lost interest in beating linguistic expressions into extensional shape. His recent work seems as remote as does Brandom’s from any attempt to answer the question “What now remains to be done?”
Section 2: Brandom as non-reductionist naturalist

So much for a fast overview of the split that I had in mind when I chose the title for this paper. Now I want to turn back to the topic of the respectability of modal notions, and to consider Brandom’s claim, in the paper I cited, that there is only one good reason for this new-found respectability. This is that we have come to realize that every use of every concept presupposes the ability to wield a normative vocabulary.

When we grasp this point, Brandom thinks, we realize that we cannot even use “Red here now!” as a meaningful utterance—that is to say, as a move of what Brandom calls “the game of giving and asking for reasons”—unless we understand and acknowledge expressions which formulate norms for the use of the component words, and for the expression as a whole. Since even the strictest reductionist would agree that a normative vocabulary provides sufficient resources for “clarifying” counterfactuals and modal locutions, if you have that vocabulary you have it all. We can, for example, define nomologicality in terms of projectibility, and explicate projectibility in terms of
locutions such as “If you project that predicate, we shall either beat you with sticks or withhold your teaching credentials, and perhaps both.”

The threat of Cartesian dualism which was the original incitement to worry about belief-sentences now recedes. For, as Brandom puts it, we have shifted “from a broadly Cartesian dualism of the mental and the physical to a broadly Kantian dualism of the normative and the factual”. (MIE, p. 623) But this latter dualism is perfectly compatible with Darwin’s naturalistic account of how intentionality came into the world. For a norm is just a sociological fact—a regularity of behavior—viewed from the inside. The sociologist tells us that, as a matter of a given group hits you with sticks or withholds your degree under certain conditions. The members of that group tell us about the norms by which they are bound, but there is, as the reductionists say, “nothing more” to being bound than the prevalence of the regularities that the sociologist reported. Analogously a fact is just a norm viewed from the outside: the fact, for example, that members of a certain group feel bound to use the expression “Red here now!” only under certain conditions, on pain of being beaten with sticks or being refused degrees.

The crucial move here is to interpret “nothing more to a norm than a regularity” not as the claim that a statement formulating a norm
can be replaced by one reporting a regularity but rather as the claim that the causal explanation of how the norm came to exist is the same as the causal explanation of how the regularity came to exist. The difference between the two camps in contemporary philosophy of language boils down to the question of whether this difference makes any difference: whether a simple assertion of supervenience can replace a long series of analyses of meaning, and can do so without loss of philosophical insight.

This question suggests the more general question: how much backup does an assertion that something is supervenient upon the physical need? If we say that the central problem of contemporary philosophy is to avoid falling into any sort of dualism, and thereby encouraging the believers in ectoplasm to come out of hiding, it may seem contemporary philosophers are preaching to the converted. For most readers of books, including many devoutly religious readers, have long been convinced of the truth of physicalism, thought of as the claim that, in Frank Jackson’s formulation, “Any world which is a minimal physical duplicate of our world is a duplicate simpliciter of our world” (FROM METAPHYSICS TO ETHICS, p. 12) and therefore a psychological duplicate, a sociological duplicate, a world containing all
only the norms found in our world, and a world in which all and only
the same states of affairs are necessary or possible. Fear of spooks, and
gratitude for allaying such fears, are simply not much evidence in the
high culture of the West.

I shall come back to this question of the utility of philosophy of
language for the culture as a whole later. For the moment I simply want
to note that Brandom’s reason for regarding modal terms as respectable
cannot be a reductionist’s reason, and so his explanation of why these
concepts are now so widely accepted fails as a sociological account.
Reductionists like Jackson want to know what physical states of affairs
make normative or modal statements true. As Jackson puts it, “serious
metaphysics requires us to address when matters described in one
vocabulary are made true by matters described in another”. (FME, p.
41) Brandom’s assurance that normative discourse is inevitable, in the
sense that it must be deployed if any discourse is to be deployed, and
that modal discourse can be boiled down to normative discourse, is of
no help in addressing that question.

Brandom’s own strategy can be of no help in what he calls, citing
Dretske, the reductionist project of making intentional soup out of non-
intentional bones. Brandom tells us what we cannot do without doing
something else—what inferential moves we have to be able to make if we are to wield this or that concept. But telling us which inferences and concepts are parasitic on which others does nothing to help us single out the meanings of expressions, or delimit what a given expression expresses, or what a certain true sentence is made true by.

I take it that Brandom has never doubted that a physical duplicate of our world would contain all and only the norms found in our world, but I doubt that he has ever believed been attracted by what Jackson calls “conceptual analysis, understood as the business of finding necessary and sufficient conditions by the method of possible cases”—that is, the method of figuring out what intuition tells us we should say in various fantastic and unforeseeable situations. (FME, p. 60). This method is, Jackson thinks, admirably illustrated by Putnam’s discovery that the watery stuff on Twin Earth is not a different kind of water, but not water at all, and by Gettier discovering that justified true belief is insufficient for knowledge.

From Brandom’s point of view, if I understand it properly, nothing of any particular philosphical interest could possibly turn on whether we agree with Gettier or Putnam or instead have intuitions, as Jackson admits some people do, which lead us to use “knowledge” or
“water” differently than these philosophers think we should. Only those who think that there are such things as intensions that determine the limits of extensions in the way that cookie-cutters determine the limits of cookies could take an interest in the question of what intuitions should prevail. If you do not think that there are such things, then you will treat controversies about whether there is no water, or just a different kind of water, on twin earth as of little value for establishing the truth of physicalism as controversies about how many sacraments Christ instituted. You will think that once the two different sets of inferences from the sentence “XYZ is the common drinkable clear liquid on Twin Earth” drawn by the people with conflicting intuitions have been made explicit, and once the two different sets of inferences which Lutherans and Catholics draw from the sentence “This is the ordination of a priest” have been made equally explicit, nothing can turn on the further question of whether or how these two sentences are made true by what physically-described states of affairs.

Presumably Jackson would see Brandom’s book adhesion to physicalism as what he calls an “act of faith”, unless Brandom is willing to go on to the heavy lifting which consist in conceptual analysis. (See FME, p. 29). Obviously, however, however, Brandom’s book is not just
a negligent, matter-of-course assertion of the supervenience of the normative on the physical. It is more like a tour through the sequence of events which was the coming to be of norms, intentionality, modality, and all the other things which philosophers might be evidence of spooks having been at work. But that description too is misleading. For Brandom is not giving us a chronology of events, but rather an explanation of how these things could not have come to be unless certain other things—anaphoric reference, singular terms and scare quotes, for example—had also emerged. It is more like a biologist saying “Before you could get what we call ‘sight’ you had to have tissues of this sort, and that sort, and the other sort”, than like the same biologist saying, “First this happened, and then that happened, and then, for the first time in the history of the planet, at exactly 2:42 PM, an organism saw something”.

Any biologist who said something of the latter sort would be exceeding both her competence and our degree of interest in the subject. All we really want to know is that she understands how evolution managed to bring the trick off. We only want enough details to help us grasp what sort of thing it took to get the job done. This is what Brandom gives us. He asks a question that philosophers have rarely
Jonathan Bennett, in his admirable little book RATIONALITY, asked whether bees counted as rational. He concluded that they did not, if only because their so-called “language” lacked both quantifiers and a negation operator. Brandom starts by going down the path that Bennett broke, but he extends it far beyond anything Bennett envisaged. His answer to the question “what does it take to be rational?” is, in one way, very familiar: to be rational you have to use logic. But his explanation of just why any species that is going to use patterns of marks and noises to glue together large groups of its members to engage in cooperative projects is going to have to be able to formulate and endorse all the inferences found in the elementary logic books is novel indeed.

Brandom describes his own enterprise as insuring that “the advent of intenionality not be left seeming magical or mysterious.” (MNI, p. 34) Anyone willing to regard the psychological as supervenient on the physical will have already concluded that it was neither. But to be told that the advent of logic is simultaneous with the advent of the psychological is surprising. For we tend to think of logic standing to thought as form to matter: bringing order out of chaos,
constraining unruly impulses. It is startling to be told, as Brandom tells us, that there it is not irrational, but the common lot of mankind, to have inconsistent beliefs. It is equally startling to be told that there is no such thing as irrational thinking, as opposed to thinking that defeats the reasonably expectations of a human community.

One way to describe the change in philosophical climate that Brandom wishes to bring about in our understanding of the relation between logic and psychology is to note that Platonic tripartite division of the soul—a division that Descartes accepted without substantial alteration—inclined us to envisage a human being who acts responsibly as having had the lower and worse parts of his soul constrained by the higher and better part. In contrast, Brandom tells us that the only constraint is of the individual organism by the surrounding group of organisms. We have no responsibilities to either the moral law or the laws of logic which do not boil down to our responsibilities to live up to the trust reposed in us by the human beings whom we encounter. Brandom is following up on the Wittgensteinian/Rylean debunking of the Platonic/Cartesian idea of the mind as an extra added ingredient added to our animal nature by saying that what makes us human is the
relations of trust which bind us together with other members of our species.

This line of thought would probably have sounded to Russell, Husserl and Carnap like a reversion to the psychogism from which Frege purportedly helped save us. But Brandom’s sociologism can also be seen as a way of rescuing us from psychologism—or at least the Cartesian brand of psychologism which interpretes mentality as something a human being can have all by herself. The object rescued by both philosophical initiatives is the same: it is the erring individual who needs a greater sense of responsibilty. But for Brandom the source of rescue is not non-empirical and ahistorical, but simply a historically contingent group of people.

Brandom can answer Wittgenstein’s rhetorical question “Why did we think that logic was something sublime?” (PI, sec. ) by saying “because we thought that we could appeal from local communities to something universal, and because we confused universality with necessary existence.” Logic is indeed universal, but only because it is implicit in anything we call linguistic practice. Once we follow Quine and Davidson in seeing that charity is necessary for translation, we can see that we are never going to come across anything that can be called a
systematically illogical or systematically irrational use of language. The worst we can encounter is a set of conversational partners who disagree with us on a large range of topics.

The sociologism which Brandom recommends as a way of saving logic from psychologism amounts to saying that we should obey the rules of logic not because they stand augustly above the world of time and chance but because doing so enables us to cooperate with other people. Logic’s constraint is not the constraint that the permanant and stable exercises on the transitory, nor the mastery that form exerts on matter, but the constraint that the group exercises on the potentially uncooperative individual.

Section 3: Brandomian semantics as therapy and as natural history

Suppose we define semantics as spelling out the meanings of various linguistic utterances, and then define Brandomian semantics as treating the meaning of an utterance as the deontic score chalked up against it. Then we shall have to say that for Brandomians there will not be just one meaning of an utterance, but as many meanings as there are
relevantly distinguishable deontic score-keepers. Unless there is a way of privileging some score-keepers over others, however, there will be no way of using semantics to criticize anybody’s utterances.

Brandom does not, as far as I can see, give us such a way. He never intervenes in disputes between scorekeepers in order to bring greater clarity. For his position requires him to leave deontic score-keeping to the relevant linguistic community, a community which may be a tiny expert culture, or may be the public as a whole. The Brandomian philosopher of language, agrees with Quine that we must abandon the “museum” notion of meaning—meanings considered as a set of enduring and unchanging objects labeled by linguistic expressions— but breaks with Quine over the question philosophy, as opposed to the arts and the sciences, can show that some linguistic expressions are better for us to use than others. For Quine as for Carnap, the philosopher of language can be still be of use to the culture critic. For Brandom as for Davidson, he cannot. Once one drops the myth of the museum, these latter philosophers say, you are not in a position to tell anybody what they are ‘really” talking about when they use a certain expression. Nor are you in a position to tell them that their
use of language is confused. At best, you might be able to say that it is unusual, or unproductive.

So what good is a philosopher of language who cannot diagnose unclarity or confusion? Well, one thing such a philosopher can do is to help the wider culture understand why no roads lead from an account of how deontic score-keeping works to a critique of a critique of contemporary score-keeping practices. This is something that needs to be done, because if you know how deontic score-keeping works you know all that will ever be known about intentionality, and therefore about such traditionally dark and deep subjects as “the nature of the mind”. If the notion of culture criticism can be broadened so as to include the activity of explaining to people why philosophy will not do some of the things sometimes expected of it, then Brandom, Davidson and Wittgenstein can count as culture critics.

To try to get from Brandomian semantics to cultural criticism in a narrower sense—the sort of culture criticism Carnap and Popper thought they were practicing—would be like trying to get from an understanding of what it takes for a social practice to count as a card game to a critique of the various games included in Hoyle. To make more explicit what Hoyle takes for granted does not help one decide
whether to play poker or bridge. To make explicit why you have to have anaphora in order to have singular terms does not help you decide which singular terms to use, or what inferences to make from any particular utterance containing the ones you do use.

Brandom’s book can only have the desirable therapeutic effect I am imputing to it, however, for those who accept the claim that there is nothing deep and dark about the mind save the irreducibility of the intentional, and the further claim that the latter boils down to the irreducibility of the normative. Nobody is going to bother reading MAKING IT EXPLICIT who has not prepared to see these claims as at least plausible suggestions. (That is why reading it would be profitless for Searle or Nagel, for example.) Persons not so prepared will not be impressed by the argument for the ineliminability of the normative that I summarized above, and modal discourse will still seem to them as requiring something like possible-world semantics before it can be made respectable.

At this point it is fair to ask: what does Brandom tell those of us who had already accepted both theses that we did not know before? What exactly does his neologism “deontic score-keeping” add to the familiar notion of “language game”? Perhaps the simplest answer is: he
shows us what the constraints on the use of marks and noises are that makes it possible for us to be said to be reasoning rather than simply sounding off in habitual and accepted ways. The reason that MAKING IT EXPLICIT is 600 pages of heavy lifting rather than 200 pages of debunking aphorisms is that nobody before has ever combined the virtues of PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS with those of TRACTATUS LOGICO-PHILOSOPHICUS. Nobody has explained why languages have to be pretty much as they are if they are to serve the purposes they do, other than philosophers who think that the main purpose they serve is to represent states of elementary physical particles with the help of handy abbreviations.

For Brandom, in contrast, the main purpose languages serve is to enable us to engage in cooperative projects of a complexity significantly greater than those of the bees and the beavers. Languages are as they are because, for example, language-users have to have anaphora, scare quotes and singular terms to get that job done. It turns out that you would not be able to give and ask for reasons if you had not mastered these basic moves, just as you would not be able to construct a catapult or a computer if you had not mastered the lever, the pulley, and the other so-called “simple machines”.
The difference between Brandom’s conception of logic and those of Russell, Carnap and Husserl is the difference between something that is owed respect—especially if we want to do what most becomes a human being, represent reality accurately—and something that we have to use in order to get a lot of things we want. This difference goes along with the difference between making representations fall out of inferences and treating inferences as a way of juggling representations.