

**BRANDOM AND DAVIDSON:
WHAT DO WE NEED TO ACCOUNT FOR
THINKING AND AGENCY?¹**

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There are various approaches to *truth* and *knowledge* (in fact, cataloguing them has become something of a philosophical industry of its own); and in many cases, their explanations are taken to underlie the explanation of other crucial concepts, like *language*, *reason* etc. Especially in recent years, some of the approaches have come to be based on reducing semantics to pragmatics. An outstanding example of such a pragmatist approach is that of Bob Brandom, who bases the explication of both truth and knowledge on his consideration of *normative pragmatics*. A less explicitly pragmatist approach to truth and knowledge was offered by Donald Davidson (who is surely not a pragmatist in the narrow sense of the word, but may be thought about as one in the wider sense proposed by Brandom, 2002, in which pragmatism means starting from the practical rather than the theoretical). In this paper I would like to point out that the discrepancy between these two approaches may be smaller than it would *prima facie* seem. To show this, I first turn my attention briefly to the general problem of theoretically accounting for human minds.

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1. Mind-having and the “*ubs-erasure*”

Minds seem to be things peculiarly different from the middle-sized dry goods which surround us, and having a mind appears to be peculiarly different from having a beard or a Japanese car. This difference was famously accounted for by Descartes: beards and Japanese cars are instances of *res extensa*, things existing in spacetime where they interact with each other, whereas minds are instances of *res cogitans* – existing somewhere outside of spacetime but nevertheless able to somehow “aim at” the spacetime things.

Nowadays, philosophers are no longer willing to subscribe to this kind of dualism; but it would be hard to deny that mind-having is something else than beard-having. Some of them (famously Ryle) have argued that the talk about “minds” and “having minds” is only metaphoric; but even so there remains what appears to be a qualitative difference between entities with minds (be it in whatever metaphoric sense) and entities without them. There are philosophers who see the difference only in the complexity of the former entities; but there are also those who are convinced that the *prima facie* qualitative difference cannot be so reduced to a quantitative one and that it *must* be explained in *some* “dualistic” mode. (After all, as Popper once put it, all philosophy is enlightened common sense.)

However, the linguistic turn has opened not only the Rylean way of dealing with minds: it has also provided for the possibility of what can be called the *ubs-erasure*: recasting Descartes’ *s-ubs-tances* as *stances* (and vocabularies). The new version of the Cartesian story tells us that we need one kind of stance and one kind of vocabulary to account for the entities which we find mindless, and another kind of stance and another kind of vocabulary for those which we see as minded. We assume what Dennett (1987) calls the *physical stance* to the former, whereas we assume the *intentional stance* to the latter. And whereas for the former the language of physics suffices, for the latter we require a different kind of language.

If one agrees with this agenda, then the next question one faces is the following: *What (linguistic or conceptual) resources (over and above*

*those of the language of physics*²) do we need to account for mind-havers & agents?

There are various kinds of answers offered to this question. Some of them are quite close to the original dualism of Descartes. Thus, Searle (1983) can be seen as arguing that what we need is an irreducible concept of *intentionality* that is to refer to a peculiar feature of the mind-stuff which makes it quite close to the Cartesian *res cogitans*. Others deny any need whatsoever: thus, Quine (1960) and other physicalists argue that everything should be ultimately describable within the language of physics (The *locus classicus* of this view is, of course, Carnap (1932)). However, some of the offered answers lie between these two polar extremes.

Rorty (1980), for instance, seems to be almost agreeing with Quine that it is not only possible, but also desirable to describe everything by means of the language of physics. He hastens to add, though, that this must not be understood as ruling out the possibility of alternative ways of describing the world or its parts, or implying that any such alternative description would be either uninteresting or translatable into the language of physics.

However, there are philosophers who insist on the need for *conceptual dualism*: on the need for a specific language to render possible an adequate account of the mental, which is not translatable into the language of physics. And here it is that Davidson and Brandom enter the scene, for both of them subscribe to a variety of this dualism. Surely the most popular version is Davidson's (1970) *anomalous monism*, the idea that though both the mentalist talk and the physicalist (especially the neurophysiologist) talk describe one and the same reality (namely people and especially the states of their brains), the former employs conceptual resources irreducible to those of the latter.

Drawing on the ideas of Wilfrid Sellars, Brandom (1984) offers a different version of conceptual dualism: he is convinced that in order to be able to give an adequate account of language and the mind we need *normative vocabulary* and, more primarily, the *normative mode of speech*, which is again not translatable into the declarative mode (and

² It should be noted that the term "language of physics" is, of course, rather vague.

therefore not into the physicalist language which operates exclusively in this mode). Hence, according to Brandom, our accounts of the mental cannot be reduced to statements of what *is* the case, for they irreducibly contain also statements of what *ought to be* the case.

2. Davidson & Brandom

Davidson is a physicalist in that he accepts that there is a sense in which the physicalist description of the world is *complete* – there is no part or no corner of the world which would escape it. We *can* say that there is nothing save “atoms in the void” obeying the causal laws. However, Davidson insists, we happen to have, besides the language of physics (and all its augmentations entertained within natural sciences as well as within “folk science”, which are supposed to be reducible to it), also another one that serves a purpose so different that the conceptual resources it embodies are not even “commensurable”³ with those underlying the physicalist talk.

While the ultimate aim of the physicalist talk is the articulation of inevitable causal laws, the other kind of talk has never aimed at anything like this. Though it also strives to reach “laws” that should help us orient within the world, these “laws” are not of the kind of those sought by natural sciences – they are tentative, imprecise, allowing for exceptions. While the law *If a body moves with constant velocity, then the length of its trajectory equals the product of its velocity and the time of the movement* is supposed to be infallible and exceptionless, the “law” *If somebody knows that it is raining and wants to stay dry, he will use an umbrella* is at most probable and unsure.

Thus what we have developed (and needed to have developed), in addition to the vocabulary corresponding to the basic conceptual apparatus of physics (and folk physics), is a *vocabulary of agency* (as Ramberg, 2000, calls it). Moreover, according to Davidson, this whole

³ I employ this term with full awareness of Davidson's disbelief in the very intelligibility of incommensurable languages and conceptual schemes. I think that it is indeed the case that this kind of incommensurability occurs within the very heart of Davidson's teaching. However, to discuss this *prima facie* contradiction in Davidson's doctrines would be far beyond the scope of the present paper.

vocabulary can be seen as concentrable into a single term: namely the term *true*. It is this very term and the concept expressed by it that is the key to the distinctiveness of the mental:

Without a grasp of the concept of truth, not only language, but thought itself, is impossible. Truth is important ... because without the idea of truth we would not be thinking creatures, *nor would we understand what it is for someone else to be a thinking creature.* (1999a, p. 114; my emphasis).

Brandom, on the other hand, claims that the primary difference between the mentalist talk and the physicalist one does not consist in a surplus of *vocabulary* or *conceptual equipment* – what is basic is the normative *mode*. We, mind-havers and language-users, are characterized in that we know how to bind ourselves by rules; and to feel bound by a rule means to know that something *ought* (or *ought not*) *to be the case*. (This, to be sure, does give rise to an enhancement of vocabulary, to the introduction of words like *ought to*, *correct* etc., but these are explicative of our normative conduct, of our attitude to non-normative statements in which we do not see such a statement as something which is the case but as something that should be the case.)

Hence what we need, according to Brandom, to adequately account for minds (and meanings) is not a specific concept or concepts, but rather a specific mode of speech: Thus, Brandom speaks about “a shift from a broadly Cartesian dualism of the mental and the physical to a broadly Kantian dualism of the normative and the factual” and he claims:

Descartes’s opposition of two kinds of descriptive properties (corresponding to ontological kinds of substances) was contrasted with a deeper opposition between descriptive and prescriptive attitudes – between attributing properties and attributing proprieties. (1994, p. 623)

Now these two approaches may appear so different that if we vote for conceptual dualism, we appear to be forced to take sides: to vote either for Davidson, or for Brandom. What I would like to argue for in this paper is that the two approaches are not really mutually exclusive and that we can, to a large extent, side with *both* of them.

3. Truth as a form of correctness

From the Brandomian side, a rapprochement does not seem to be excessively problematic – for Brandom sees truth as a matter of a specific kind of correctness: “Assessments of truth, no less than assessments of rationality, are normative assessments. Truth and rationality are both forms of correctness.” (1994, 17). (Already Sellars, 1992, p. 101, urged that truth is nothing else than correct assertibility: “for a proposition to be true is for it to be *correctly* assertible”.) So, from this side, it might appear that the only difference is that Davidson reduces the whole normative realm to a single normative concept, that of truth.

Why does Brandom appeal to normativity in the first place? He notes, as many other philosophers have, that the necessary condition for an expression’s having a specific meaning is that it be employed in a way which is in some sense *regular*. However, at the same time he notes that this cannot be a sufficient condition. What he would give as an official reason is that Wittgenstein has shown that *every* factual way of using an expression can be seen as regular in uncountable ways. Any finite sequence of utterances can be prolonged as to be made regular, and can be done so in an unlimited number of ways. Therefore to explicate meaningfulness as mere regularity would overgenerate: it would render *everything* as meaningful.

To this it might be objected that meaningfulness presupposes a *narrower* kind of regularity: after all we *do* – as a matter of fact – classify already finite, and often relatively short, sequences of events as regular/irregular. (I shall disregard the fact that I do not know about anybody who would have succeeded in making this idea of a “narrower regularity” reasonably precise.) But even if we conceded this, the identification of meaningfulness with regular employment would still erase the intuitive boundary between true meaningfulness and meaninglessness; and consequently between mindedness and mindlessness. For does a sound come to *mean* “It is 20°C” by being regularly emitted by a thermometer when the temperature reaches 20°C? Therefore Brandom rejects *regularism*: the view that being rule-governed is nothing over and above being regular.

Hence, Brandom concludes, meaningfulness cannot be a matter of regularity alone – what is needed is a form of *rule-governedness*.

However, as we know again from Wittgenstein, we cannot say that meaningfulness is governedness by *explicit* rules. (As any explicit rule must be itself *meaningful*, this would lead to an infinite regress.) Therefore Brandom rejects also *regulism*: the conception that any rule worth the name must be explicit. Thus he, as Wittgenstein before him, sees the task of philosophy as that of steering between the Scylla of regularism and the Charybda of regulism.

Now Davidson is well-known for his derogatory pronouncements about the role of rules in language and in semantics. Thus, e.g., in his discussion with Dummett he asks: “What magic ingredient does holding oneself responsible to the usual way of speaking add to the usual way of speaking?” (Davidson, 1994, p.8), a question which some of his followers interpret as a claim to the effect that once linguistic behaviour is regular, there is no need of its being, in addition, rule-governed (see, e.g., Glüer, 2000, 458 f. 11). But is this really Davidson’s view?

In fact, Davidson has repeatedly urged that the concept of truth is one side of the coin, the other side of which is the concept of error – and as there is hardly an error where there is no correct/incorrect distinction, there is a sense in which even for him truth *is* inseparably connected with a correctness:

It is difficult to exaggerate the magnitude of the step from native or learned disposition to respond to stimuli of a certain sort, to employing a concept with the awareness of the chance of error. ... This is where the concept of truth enters, for there is no sense in saying a disposition is in error – one cannot fail to “follow” a disposition, but one can fail to follow a rule. (1999a, p. 112)

This suggests that even for Davidson truth *does* have a lot to do with correctness, and hence with normativity – insofar as the concepts of correctness and normativity are inseparable. Is, then, his account really at odds with that of Brandom? I do not think so. I am convinced that what Davidson so vehemently rejects is a role of rules within semantics which Brandom himself does *not* endorse – it is the conviction that the rules which are constitutive of semantics are to be taken as telling us how to talk.

This point can be elucidated with the help of a distinction articulated by Glüer (2000), who says (p. 460; my translation from German):

‘Correctness’ in the sense of only semantic correctness thus does not yet mean anything more than that utterances can be *conceptually categorized*., i.e. here that they can be *sorted out* into true and false. This talk of ‘correctness’ appears thereby deontically wholly innocent; to show that a use ‘correct’ in this sense is at the same time already a prescribed use, we must answer the question about the source of the prescriptive force, i. e. the question why we *should* do the ‘correct’.

Although the distinction urged by Glüer *is* important, I find the way she articulates it misleading, as the question *why we should do the correct* is a bit odd – in fact self-answering. That we *should* do the *correct* appears to be a matter of the semantics of “should” and “correct” alone. Therefore, it seems to me that whoever talks about a correctness cannot but talk about a kind of a *should*. So, in contrast to Glüer, I think that the idea of a “deontically wholly innocent correctness” is ill-conceived.

Nevertheless, I do think that the contrast between what we could call “merely semantic correctness” and a “more deontically laden correctness” *is* something to notice. I think that what Davidson is protesting against is that the rules of language are a matter of the latter, i.e. that they oblige us to talk in a certain way – perhaps, as Dummett suggested, to talk as others do. However, this is not what Brandom talks about when he speaks about the normativity of meaning. Brandom – as I understand him – takes it as a plain fact that we not only *use* language, but also treat others' and our own instances of using language as correct or incorrect. This is not to say that we would explicitly classify them with the help of rules, but rather that we assume certain *normative attitudes* to them. And what is important, we help force the rules, especially the rules of inference, on the speakers in the sense that we hold them for responsible not only for what they literally claim, but also for what follows from what they claim.

It is not controversial to say that one is responsible for the consequences of one's deeds. If I hurt somebody and he consequently dies, then I would be punished for the deed. Analogously, if I make a claim, I will be held responsible for whatever follows from my claim. (Imagine I claimed that person *X* stole my car; and at the court I am asked: “So you have accused Mr. *X* of theft?” It is clear that saying “No, your Honour, I did not accuse him of theft, I only said he stole my car” would hardly help me – by claiming that he stole I *commit* myself to the claim that he committed a theft, for the latter claim *follows* from the former one.) The difference is that

whereas the former consequence is causal, the latter is “logical” – and it is precisely the distinguishing mark of us, agents, that we live not only within the causal order, which predates us and is totally independent of us, but also within the “logical order”, which we have implemented and which we are maintaining. (That the latter order is no less “hard” than the former was commented on already in the *Ecclesiasticus*: “The stroke of the whip maketh marks in the flesh: but the stroke of the tongue breaketh the bones. Many have fallen by the edge of the sword: but not so many as have fallen by the tongue.”)

Hence Brandom's claim is not that the inferential rules, which he takes to be constitutive of semantics, tell us how we should speak, let alone that they might tell us to speak as others do. (They perhaps do tell us, in a sense, how we should speak in some very specific contexts, e.g. when we want to draw inferences or articulate mathematical proofs; but they surely constitute no manual for making oneself understandable.) Let us invoke the well worn comparison of language and chess: the rules of chess also do not tell us how to play; they only restrict the spectrum of our possibilities. (And though the term “restrict” indicates a purely negative achievement, it is important to realize that, on the positive side, such a restriction may lead to the constitution of a kind of “inner space”, which, in the case of language, may be seen as a *space of meaningfulness*. Cf. Peregrin (2001, esp. §§ 7.8, 10.7). See also Brandom (1979).)

However, there is an important and rarely noticed distinction between language and chess⁴. What is directly comparable to playing a game like chess is speaking *a particular language*. When I violate the rules of English, I cease to talk *English*, but I need not cease to talk in a way which is intelligible to my audience. Speaking a particular language is an enterprise instrumental to the more general task of communicating; and we may do justice to the general task even by violating rules of particular languages. I think this is the fact pointed out by Davidson.

However, it does not seem to contradict the Brandomian stance. The rules of languages constitute certain spaces of meaningfulness without which communication of the kind we are used to would be impossible. But these

⁴ There are, to be sure, other important differences, such as the one that chess is 'self-contained' whereas language is 'opened to the world' (see Peregrin, *ibid.*, § 1.3).

spaces can be utilized in various ways: we may dwell within a single one, or fluctuate between them, or perhaps lean on some of them as if from outside – i.e. not respect any existing rules, but make use of the fact that these rules obtain. (This is what appears to lie behind the famous Gricean considerations: what we communicate need not be what the sentence we communicate means; but in communicating it we usually somehow make use of the fact that the sentence means what it does.⁵)

4. Correctness as a matter of attitudes

To clear the way for the Brandom-Davidson truce, we have to notice that Davidson agrees with Brandom also in that language is essentially not only a matter of using expressions and thereby producing utterances, but also of assuming attitudes to the utterances. This (as we have seen) is what lays the foundations of Brandom's normativism:

For brutes or bits of the inanimate world to qualify as engaging in practices that implicitly acknowledge the applicability of norms, they would have to exhibit the behavior that counts as treating conduct (their own or that of others) *as* correct or incorrect. (1994, p. 33).

As Sellars put it, what is essential for language and thought is “the ability to language about languagins, to criticize languagins” (1974, p. 425)

However, the same is essential to Davidson's idea of triangulation, which constitutes the heart of his explanation of semantic content:

[T]riangulation in its pure state: two or more animals equipped to correlate the responses of the others with the events and situations they jointly distinguish. ... Most of the time, one assumes, the reactions of the troop to a threat or a treat are simultaneous. The exceptions provide the entering wedge for correction and the

⁵ When somebody asks me where to get petrol (Grice, 1989, p. 32) and I answer "There is a garage round the corner", I communicate that he might be able to get the petrol round the corner, which is certainly *not* what the sentence I uttered means; but I would not communicate what I did if the sentence did not mean what it does.

dawning of sense of an independent reality and of the possibility of error.” (Davidson, 1999b, p. 731).

Is, then, the explicitly normative approach of Brandom in accordance with the “implicitly normative” one of Davidson? Is the normativity talked about by Brandom of the same kind as the one implicit to Davidson's approach? Is the kind of correctness that is essential for Brandom the same as that presupposed by Davidson? And is the *source* of this correctness the same for both of them?

Making an utterance may be surely correct or incorrect in various senses of the word. Suppose I say “I am hungry”. The utterance is clearly *correct* in the sense of being well-formed, not violating the rules of English syntax. However, it may be as well *incorrect* in the sense of being false – perhaps I am not really hungry! But again, it may be *correct* in the sense that it is my appropriate declamation in a theater play I am just performing. And it can be, at the same time, *incorrect* in the sense that performing this particular play violates some established social norm – perhaps offends some group of citizens. It can be, nevertheless, *correct* in the sense that the offense provokes an action which, as a by-product, saves mankind from an impending catastrophe ...

To each of the above forms of correctness there corresponds a *should*; and from top to down the *should's* look more and more like the *should* of the categorical imperative. Conversely, we can say that from down to top the *should's* can be seen as categorical only if we disregard greater and greater parts of human affairs and restrict ourselves to a limited kind of practice: if we restrict ourselves to our current community traffic, to performing the play, to asserting, to putting together English sentences Hence, we may say, what increases from top to down is the extent to which the corresponding correctness is, in terms of the previous paragraph, *deontically laden*.

For Davidson, it is unambiguously the level of *truth* which amounts to the notion of relevant correctness. (And what he protests against is that this level be somehow indirectly tied to a higher level, via a rule that we should speak the truth in some higher sense of *should* than the one amounting to the “purely semantic correctness”.) And there is no reason to suppose that Brandom does not concur with him here: “correct assertability” surely does not amount to anything like well-formedness,

nor to anything like virtuous – it amounts to having a winning strategy in the game of giving and asking for reasons.

However, where Brandom and Davidson still do differ is in the answer to the question whether we can *reduce* the concept of truth to a concept of correctness. Whereas Brandom sometimes appears to think that this is possible and that thus we need not give the concept of truth any special pride of place, Davidson rejects the possibility. He urged that the concept of truth is essentially irreducible (he even claims that to try to define it is a “folly”; see Davidson (1996)).

Is there a non-circular way of singling out the form of correctness of our utterances which amounts to their truth? It seems to be clear that the truth of an assertion could at most amount to *one kind of its correctness* – clearly there are assertions which can be said to be correct, despite not being true (*viz.* the examples above). And, what is important, if Davidson is right in that it is truth alone which grounds meaning, the other forms of correctness are semantically irrelevant.

The question emerging, then, is the following: what species of correctness is truth? And the problem is whether we can answer it in a non-circular way. I think that Davidson’s position can be characterized as yielded by the conviction that this is *not* possible. I subscribe to this; and I would suggest that Brandom – in view of the fact that there is no way of delimiting the kind of correctness which amounts to truth (and which underlies our vocabulary of agency and is thus constitutive of both our mental and our semantic talk) – should follow Davidson in taking the concept of truth for *irreducible*.

The last thing which remains to be investigated concerns the source of the normative authority associated with the *should* which underlies our vocabulary of agency. Could it not be that here the two philosophers differ quite radically (and that their congeniality diagnosed so far is, after all, a mere illusion) – that whereas Davidson thinks that what we are responsible to are things themselves, Brandom sees the source of the authority as a mere matter of the habits and arbitrary conventions of our community? Despite the fact that Davidson, in contrast to Brandom, has relatively little to say about communal rules and practices, the following considerations show why I do not think this is the case.

Firstly, Davidson is not a correspondence theorist who would be prepared to maintain that things themselves are in a position to wield this

kind of authority (his episodic coquetry with the correspondence theory notwithstanding). According to him it is only *via* our linguistic practices that we come to be encountered with *objects* in the first place – it is “communication” that “is the basis of our concept of objectivity”; it is “the community of minds” that is “the basis of our concept of objectivity” (1991, p. 164). Secondly, Brandom does not see communal practices and their rules as separable from the things of the world in which their bearers live. The practices, as Brandom stresses

... must not be thought of as hollow, waiting to be filled up by things; they are not thin and abstract, but as concrete as the practice of driving nails with a hammer. ... According to such a construal of practices, it is wrong to contrast discursive practice with a world of facts and things *outside* it, modeled on the contrast between words and the things they refer to⁶. (1984, p. 332)

Hence it would seem that things can wield an authority only *via* practices which “incorporate” them; whereas practices can in general achieve the level of objectivity which we associate with truth only *via* incorporating things. Therefore the opposition between responsibility to the way things are and to the way our practices run cannot be an opposition separating Davidson from Brandom. Though the former might appear to stress the world more than our practices whereas the latter rather the other way around, I think that this is merely a difference of accentuation, not a true divergence.

5. Brandom and Davidson on the nature of language

To conclude, let me present some considerations concerning the difference between the accounts of the nature of language as given by the two philosophers. According to Davidson – as far as I understand him – the development of language starts from an activity which is wholly graspable in physicalistic terms, an activity of triangulation, which crucially hinges upon the concept of *deviation*. In the final development,

⁶ In this respect, Lance (1998) is very right in pointing out that language should not be compared with a *game* like chess, but rather with a *sport* like basketball.

deviations are replaced with *errors*, and the whole enterprise of language is no longer construable in terms of physics – we need the concept of truth, which is not reducible to them.

Davidson's story about the emergence of language thus contains a substantial gap: he never tells us how it comes about that mere deviations mutate into errors, and how our pre-linguistic activities, which are nothing more than grist to the eternal mill of causes and effects, develop into the fully-fledged language, and with it the fully-fledged thought and agency, which fall under the legislation of the concept of truth. (The gap is here: it is not the case, Davidson, 1999c, 129, urges, "that the consensus defines the concept of truth, but that it creates the space for its application".) He does not tell us because he thinks there is nothing to be told – the development takes place within the no-man's land between the physicalistic realm of law and (what I, following Brandom, would like to see as) the normative realm of freedom, a land which is not describable in terms of either of its neighbours:

The difficulty in describing the emergence of mental phenomena is a conceptual problem: it is the difficulty of describing the early stages in the maturing of reason, the stages that precede the situation in which concepts like intension, belief and desire have clear application. ... What we lack is a satisfactory vocabulary for describing the intermediary steps. ... We have many vocabularies for describing nature when we regard it as mindless, and we have a mentalistic vocabulary for describing thought and intentional action; what we lack is a way of describing what is in between. (Davidson, 1999c, p. 127-8)

Hence the gap appears to be principally unbridgeable.

Some of those who would like to do away with the gap appear to conclude that if it resists being bridged, it must be denied. They stick to the opinion that error *cannot* be, on some level of analysis, anything more than a kind of deviation, and hence that truth *cannot* be anything more than a form of agreement. Understood in this way, the whole enterprise of language appears no longer to escape the reach of the language of physics. Such attempts result into what Blackburn (1984) terms "democratic harmony" theories (and I think that the deepest source of Davidson's quarrel with Dummett is Davidson's feeling that Dummett is aiming at something dangerously close to such a theory).

Brandom is not willing to subscribe to anything like this. He agrees with Davidson that there is a qualitative gap between the prelinguistic, which can be accounted for in physicalistic terms, and the fully-fledged linguistic, for which we need, according to him, the normative mode of speech. In this sense, he agrees that the gap is essentially unbridgeable: there is no way to translate the talk of fully-fledged language – and thought and agency – into the language of physics. Nevertheless, he is convinced that the gap can be narrowed down in the sense of giving a more explicit description of how language comes into being than Davidson would allow.

Hence what I see as the crucial difference between the stances of Davidson and Brandom here is that Brandom wants to say a bit more about the *hic sunt leones* zone between the prelinguistic and the linguistic. This is what he achieves in terms of his concept of *normative attitude*: attitudes by means of which we treat what other people do as right or wrong. It is these attitudes, implicit to our behaviour, that provide for the emergence of the normative: utterances become right or wrong (and especially true or false) not because they would be uniform across speakers, but because they would be “accepted” or “rejected”, “awarded” or “penalized”, “taken as right” or as “wrong”.

Of course this does not bridge or close the gap entirely. The gap inevitably reappears as that between pre-normative attitudes describable physicalistically, like the tendency to beat someone with sticks if he does *A*, or give him money if he does *B*; and truly *normative* attitudes which can only be characterized with the help of concepts like *right* and *wrong*.) The bridge from the non-normative to the normative can never really be built: for if we try to do so using physicalistic terms, we cannot reach the normative shore; whereas using normative terms we are there before we start.

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