Brandom & Hume on the Genealogy of Modals

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Thanh Binh, Sydney, 14 October 2005
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“Davidson lets us think of the history of language ... as Darwin taught us to think of the history of a coral reef.” [Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*]
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2. The genealogy of modals

3. Humean expressivism: biology not ontology

4. Ontology versus biology – where does Brandom stand?

5. Conclusion
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[The investigation of the nature and limits of the explicit expression in principles of what is implicit in discursive practices yields a powerful transcendental argument—a . . . transcendental expressive argument for the existence of objects . . . .] [1994, xxii–xxiii]

[It is an] argument that (and why) the only form the world we can talk and think of can take is that of a world of facts about particular objects and their properties and relations.” [1994, xxii–xxiii]
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Its primary focus is not on knowledge itself but on \textit{attributions} of knowledge, attitudes towards that status. The pragmatist must ask, What are we doing when we say that someone knows something? [1994, 297]

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One who endorses the anaphoric account of what is expressed by ‘true’ and ‘refers’ must accordingly eschew the reifying move to a truth property and a reference relation. A line is implicitly drawn by this approach between ordinary truth and reference talk and variously specifically philosophical extensions of it based on theoretical conclusions that have been drawn from a mistaken understanding of what such talk expresses. Ordinary remarks about what is true and what is false and about what some expression refers to are perfectly in order as they stand; and the anaphoric account explains how they should be understood. But truth and reference are philosophers’ fictions, generated by grammatical misunderstandings. [1994, 323–324]

Various word-world relations play important explanatory roles in theoretical semantic projects, but to think of any one of these as what is referred to as “the reference relation” is to be bewitched by surface syntactic form. [1994, 325]
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[My view denies] that claims expressed using traditional semantic vocabulary make it possible for us to state specifically semantic facts, in the way that claims expressed using the vocabulary of physics, say, make it possible for us to state specifically physical facts. [1994, 326]

None of these [accounts of the the referential, objective and normative aspects of discourse] is a naturalistic account. [2000, 27]

Norms ... are not objects in the causal order. ... Nonetheless, according to the account presented here, there are norms, and their existence is neither supernatural nor mysterious. [1994, 626]

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Engaging in discursive practices and exercising discursive abilities is using words to say and mean something, hence to talk about items in the world. Those practices, the exercise of those abilities, those uses, establish semantic relations between words and the world. This is one of the big ideas that traditional pragmatism brings to philosophical thought about semantics: don’t look to begin with to the relation between representings and representeds, but to the nature of the doing, of the process, that institutes that relation.

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