I N T E R V I S T E

Conversation with Ernie Lepore

Domenica Bruni

Dr. Ernie Lepore is a Board of Governors professor of philosophy. He is the author of numerous books and papers in the fields of philosophy of language, philosophical logic, metaphysics and philosophy of mind. Among them, Liberating Content *(2016),* Imagination and Convention *(Oxford University Press, 2015, with Matthew Stone),* Meaning, Mind and Matter: Philosophical Essays *(Oxford University Press, 2011, with Barry Loewer),* Language turned on itself *(2007, Oxford University Press, with Herman Cappelen),* Donald Davidson's truth-theoretic Semantics*, (Oxford University Press, 2007, with Kirk Ludwig),* Donald Davidson: Meaning, Truth, Language and Reality*, (Oxford University Press, 2005, with Kirk Ludwig)* Insensitive Semantics *(Basil Blackwell, 2004, with Herman*

Cappelen). He has edited several books, including The Handbook in Philosophy of Language*, (ed. with B. Smith, Oxford University Press, 2006),* Truth and Interpretation *(Blackwell, 1989), and is co-editor with Zenon Pylyshyn, of* What is Cognitive Science? *(Blackwell, 1999). He is also general editor of the Blackwell series "Philosophers and Their Critics".*

1: When did you start thinking about philosophy?

EL: My first exposure to philosophy was through two "philosophical" novels I read in high school: Camus' *The Stranger* and Sartre's *Nausea*. A friend of mine recommended them but I found them weird. I believe my real introduction to philosophy came from a very different source. My close childhood friend Brian McLaughlin and I both grew up in an environment where there was not a lot of interest in the arts and the humanities, e.g., in classical music, art, literature, poetry. Instead of reading the classics and writing poetry or visiting the great museums that were all just a short bus ride from where we lived in New Jersey, Brian and I literally spent hours upon hours analyzing all of our interactions with anyone we encountered — in retrospect I realize this practice was mostly a form of self-protection. To us, all newcomers were potential threats with whom we could not feel until we could explain their intentions to ourselves, or at least show they meant us no harm. And I think my real introduction to the practice of philosophy began unwittingly back then with these exercises in unearthing the practical reasoning of others. Some discussions would run into the wee hours of the next morning. And in the process, we concocted some of the most bizarre accounts of why others behaved as they did. You know, the way philosophers usually behave.

2.What does it mean to be an analytical philosopher?

EL: Unlike earlier generations, mine has been quite open minded about what counts as philosophy. For example, I became friends with Umberto Eco in the early 1980's. I don't think most analytic philosophers would count him as one of their own, but I still recognized that he was quite brilliant and great fun to talk with. I think my generation's attitude towards the division between analytic and non-analytic philosophy is two-fold: first, that as long as we can foster philosophical progress however we see fit,

others can do whatever they want, and second, I doubt there is a useful analysis of what counts as analytic. Indeed, my so-called analytic training convinces me that any effort to provide one will either fail or be completely arbitrary. That said, I recall that when I moved to Rutgers from Notre Dame, my new colleagues, including my old friend Brian McLaughlin, complained that my arguments were not laid out in sufficient detail to be convincing, and that my philosophical approach was more big picturish than polemical. I don't know if that's a feature of analytic philosophy, namely, laying out arguments in detail, but it placed a constraint on how I then did pursue a philosophical life. (As an aside, if there ever was a "picturish" philosopher in the contemporary Anglo-American tradition, it was Donald Davidson!).

3. In your opinion, does the distinction between analytic and continental philosophers still make sense?

EL: I'm embarrassed to say that I don't know enough about what's going on in the continent to take an informed stand on this issue. I'm better off not saying something stupid and instead keeping quiet about it, except to note that to the extent to which different styles don't prevent communication, I don't think there is a significant distinction.

4. How did the idea of founding the Center for Cognitive Science at Rutgers come about?

EL: In the early 80s, several junior faculty from Rutgers were accepted into the first Cognitive Science institute organized by Jerry Fodor and Zenon Pylyshyn at the University of Washington in Seattle. I was lucky to be one of those selected, and so, at the beginning of my career, I spent a summer in Seattle learning from philosophers, psychologists, linguists, computer scientists, and mathematicians about cognitive science. There were probably 50 participants in that institute, and today the list of participants reads like a who's who in contemporary cognitive science. When the Rutgers faculty returned in the fall, we wanted to continue the discussion, so we organized the Rutgers Cognitive Science Reading Group, drawing faculty from a variety of disciplines. This was quickly supplemented with a lecture series. One of the early speakers was Fodor. He let us know that he was leaving MIT after many years and moving to the Graduate Center, CUNY. I believe he spent two years there before we convinced him Rutgers was a better fit. Offering a CogSci center with its

own faculty didn't hurt either, and sure enough, within a couple of years he had his own building and his own set of offices, his own faculty. Speaking for myself, being a member and sometimes director of the center, has significantly changed the trajectory of my research; I believe for the better. I wrote a book with a computer scientist, collaborated on articles with psychologists and linguists, and benefited tremendously from the interaction.

5. Can philosophy be studied today by separating it from the empirical sciences? Is there a philosophical methodology different from the kind of methodology used by the empirical sciences?

EL: John McDowell once told me that he thought philosophy could not be empirically informed by science. And he thought that the various efforts to overlap philosophy with physics, economics, psychology, or linguistics, etc. were to the detriment of philosophy. He feared that were we to continue this path we'd wind up outside of philosophy, exactly what happened when natural philosophy became physics; namely, something philosophical originally became a separate subject matter. Frankly, I didn't see the problem. Who cares how we wind up taxonomizing what it is we do? I remember once telling Alan Leslie, a well-known psychologist in our CogSci center, about my discussion with McDowell, and he remarked that cognitive science must have philosophers on the run if they are advocating isolationism. I guess I was always of the school of thought that philosophy could be informed by empirical sciences, and it was to our advantage to do so. I certainly have. Fodor, who didn't agree about much with Quine, once told me that he thought Quine's dismissal of the analytic/synthetic distinction liberated philosophers to pursue philosophy as they saw fit. With all that said, I still think there is gold to be mined here in thinking about what the role of apriority is in philosophical investigations.

6. What is the role of intuitions in philosophy?

EL: I believe being guided by intuition is particularly evident in metaphysics as it's practiced today. I find this a shortcoming. Since intuitions often clash, who decides which ones are correct? What's fascinating about philosophy of language for me is that we can appeal to linguistic data, in making decisions about which conclusions to draw. I've done that a lot in my own work, and accordingly I feel more secure with my

results. To take a concrete example, Matthew Stone and I discuss in our book *Imagination and Convention* a paradigmatic example of a conversational implicature, one that allegedly transpires when a stronger statement is followed by a weaker one, indicating the second speaker is disagreeing with the first. For example, take the case where someone describes a magic act where the magician, after placing a white handkerchief into his hat, pulls out what seems to the observer to be a red one. The subject reports the incident by saying, "And then the magician pulled out of his hat a red handkerchief". To which another observer retorts, "Well, it looked red". In such a circumstance the audience concludes that the second speaker is challenging the first. Note first that the inference is not semantic: usually things are how they seem or look.

H.P. Grice and Saul Kripke conclude it is a sociological fact that when one speaker follows up another's stronger statement by a weaker one, the second is casting doubt on the first speaker's assertion. But, as a matter of fact, Stone and I argue, the inference has nothing to do with sociology or psychology, but rather with English grammar, in particular, with conventional English intonation patterns. Notice different inferences are sanctioned contingent on the corresponding intonation pattern. If one utters, "It looked red," with a rising-falling intonation, the speaker is challenging the prior speaker, but if it is uttered with a rising intonation, the speaker is expressing surprised agreement. These are conventional aspects of English; other languages achieve this effect differently. Some use word order to indicate this distinction; others use morphology. It has nothing to do with human psychology. And this conclusion doesn't appeal to intuition. I appeal to grammatical facts, English intonation conventions, in particular.

I must say I feel least secure when I'm invoking only intuitions in defense of a philosophical position. I think it's for this reason that I don't trust analytical metaphysics, where ultimately many arguments turn on whose intuition do you trust more.

6. Can academic philosophy have a social role? And, if so, which one?

EL: You may be asking me whether I think public philosophy is helpful or useful. I think it would be if those who practice it were trained to produce public philosophy tracts. But if somebody steeped in analytic philosophy decides one day he wants to start to do public philosophy and use his philosophical skills to carry out that enterprise, it's just not obvious to me that our training provides us with skills or experience needed to pursue

public philosophy as a means to ameliorate our social community. I know in my own case I've written six or seven pieces for the *New York Times,* and many years ago for *la Repubblica* and also for *24 Ore*. I always felt like I was shortchanging the reader because I didn't really know how to approach this subject matter in a way that was accessible for the non-philosopher. Indeed, I once wrote a commissioned review of two books in the philosophy of mind for the *London Review of Books*. In the end they paid me for my effort but decided my review was too professional to be of use to their lay readership. That was an eye-opening experience for me.

7. What is it that every college student should know?

EL: I don't know if it's an accident or not. But your question is pretty much the title of a book I wrote with Sarah Jane Leslie when she was a sophomore in college. She until recently was the Dean of the Graduate School at Princeton University. In the book, we argued that it's a mistake to assume there is a Platonic ideal of what constitutes a good student. Rather, what you should do is figure out what kind of teacher you have, and so, what the teacher expects from you; if you want to access teacher's mind, you have to learn how best to interact with it. In short, the book acknowledges that teaching is a relationship between student and teacher, and therefore, the student needs to learn how best to approach a professor in order to be able to tap into a wealth of information. To this end, we contrived numerous scenarios where we suggest how best to get what you need in order to begin to master relevant materials. That is, it's a book about how to figure out how to interact with a lecturer so that what this person knows will become available to you. It is a tricky problem. The myth the book is trying to expose is the myth of a platonic student and a platonic teacher; they don't exist, and even if they did, we wouldn't need them.

8. How do listeners understand speakers? And how do speakers shape listeners' understanding?

EL: Coincidentally, I'm currently working on a book on this topic with a slight twist. I begin by reminding the reader of two pieces of received wisdom in philosophy. One is that successful communication requires shared content. A speaker can convey to an audience a desire for water by uttering "I want water" just in case both can coordinate on a shared content—that the speaker desires water. Another piece of received wisdom

emphasizes that competent speakers can fail to know, and often make errors about, the meanings of expressions without disrupting linguistic usage (Burge, 1979; Kripke, 1980; Putnam, 1975). What allows them to do so is that they are situated in a network of causal/social/historical connections, to which they defer in linguistic usage. Deference sidesteps any clash between successful usage and "arguments from ignorance and error" (Devitt and Sterelny, 1999). But, if we concede that potential ignorance exists, how then can agents coordinate on substantive shared information that successful communication presumes? How is communication possible in a world of deference?

One reaction to this puzzle is to argue that little antecedent semantic knowledge is needed since we can coordinate on meanings *on the fly*. Some argue that meanings are dynamic, i.e., constantly changing, and potentially negotiated by members of a linguistic community even during a single conversation (Armstrong, 2016, Cappelen, 2018, Carston, 2002, Davidson, 1986, Haslanger, 2012; 2018, Ludlow, 2008, 2014, Plunkett and Sundel,l 2013, i.a.). One might, however, argue that given the practice of linguistic deference, meanings are non-negotiable, i.e., are not dynamic. Meta-linguistic negotiation can neither change word meaning nor secure a mutually shared content presupposed by communication. Indeed, accounts of meta-linguistic negotiation are unsuccessful in part because they already assume coordination on shared content. In response, one can either, deny that there is widespread ignorance and error, and so, deny the need for deference, or deny that communication requires a non-trivial mutual grasp of shared content. But both options carry costs. The book I'm writing (with Una Stojnić) lays out the costs and offers a solution.

9. In the book Imagination and Convention: Distinguishing Grammar and Inference in Language*, co-written with Matthew Stone, it seems that all approaches inspired by Paul Grice and conversational implicatures are unsatisfactory. Why? Why can't figurative uses of language such as irony, sarcasm, metaphor, and humour be understood as generating conversational implicatures?*

EL: *Imagination and Convention* is an exploration of the scope and limits of linguistic knowledge. An important part of our view is that speakers' knowledge of meaning goes much further than truth conditional semantics, at least as traditionally conceived. For example, with so-called scalar implicatures, as mentioned above, where when one speaker follows up on a

prior speaker's statement with a weaker statement, most listeners will infer that the second speaker is casting doubt on the first speaker's assertion. Defenders of scalar implicatures will say we can draw such inferences not as matter of grammatically determined content (since what is and what seems to be are usually consistent), but rather on account of what we know about rational discourse.

There's much to nit-pick here but our indisputable observation, as noted earlier, is that which inference is licensed depends on which intonation pattern a speaker "performs" with an utterance of "It looked red!" English has at least two for our purposes; one licenses the inference, and one does not. All we need further know is that employing these same patterns in other languages not only does not underwrite the inference, they might even induce a bizarreness reaction, indicating a clash between the intonation pattern and acceptable modes of performance. Speakers of other languages may use word order or morphology to register the same disagreement. The point is that, contrary to the Gricean paradigm according to which these sort of inferences are guided by our psychology, the above data establish that the inference patterns are a matter of arbitrary convention, much like driving on the right side of the road. Brits drive on the left but this in no way renders them worse off than we are; they do so as an agreed upon a matter of convention.

So far, I have only sketched here one half of our argument, that is, we've only discussed conventionalized inferences. But many instances of alleged conversational implicature are not licensed as a matter of convention. For example, there's the famous case of the reader who infers that a recommendation suggests its author not have a high opinion of his student when his recommendation letter for admission into the philosophy program the reader directs, reads in its entirety, "This student is always punctual and has excellent handwriting"—traits completely irrelevant to the program the reader directs. Surely, there is no convention tying the words the speaker uttered to the conclusion that the speaker has a low opinion of the student. So, why isn't this a clear case of a conversational implicature?

The problem with this case is that there is no unique inference to draw. Perhaps, the worry is clearer with metaphorical interpretation. Most theorists believe metaphors can be interpreted but surely not as a matter of semantics. And so, a consensus forms that the interpretation of a metaphor is just a case of a conversational implicature. The reason, Stone and I argue, there is no such thing as a metaphorical interpretation calculable as a conversational implicature because there are just too many candidates for *the* interpretation of a metaphor, and this is something viable interpretation

can and should not tolerate. Interpreting a speaker's utterance should be determinate; when too many alleged interpretations are all compatible with the data, perhaps interpretation is simply the wrong enterprise.

On a positive note, we can replace interpretative hermeneutics with improvisation. Interpretation is about the retrieval we engage in pursuit of whatever information the speaker was trying to get across; this contrasts with an improvisational enterprise, where the goal is not retrieval but rather *being caused (or prompted) to think a certain way*, namely, whatever uttered words provoke the audience to pursue or entertain. Obviously, so construed there is neither a reason nor a constraint on how far the exercise can take us, thus, accounting for an indeterminate potential. The alleged conversational implicatures that cannot be alternatively explained by an appeal to convention are similar. Often, when confronted by an alleged conversational implicature, the audience complains that the proffered interpretation has the feel of a rabbit pulled out of a hat. One registers complaints that why should A be the correct interpretation when an alternative B looks to be equally satisfactory. Stone and I explain such cases by saying there may be many impressions to follow no one of which has claim to be the one and only correct interpretation.

10. To what extent is the meaning of an utterance a matter of linguistic conventions?

EL: Our reasoning in the book draws heavily on the phenomenon of coordination, as characterized by David Lewis' book *Convention* (1969). When people have learned matching strategies for acting in concert with one another, there must be a special social competence that they rely on—in effect, a kind of convention. We use evidence of coordination between speakers and hearers to argue that the conventions that shape interpretation in language go significantly further than truth-conditional semantics. So, the surprising answer to your question is that the extent is exceedingly great.

11. The book you wrote with Kirk Ludwig Donald Davidson: Meaning, Truth, Language, and Reality *argues for the validity of the truth-theoretic approach to meaning theory, but it also argues that the radical interpretation project fails and that most of Davidson's major theses based on it cannot be adequately supported. Why?*

EL: The key to understanding what Davidson is trying to argue is to realize he's assuming without argument a rather impoverished epistemic database for the radical interpreter. He holds the same view of the position of the child learning a first language. The mistake Fodor and I attribute to Davidson is to arbitrarily limit the epistemic position of both the interpreter and the child. Davidson then goes on to argue that, despite this highly limiting constraint, linguistic success still ensues. And on the basis of this alleged success of radical interpretation, Davidson goes on in a series of papers throughout his career to draw some of his most well-known sweeping and novel philosophical theses, e.g., the impossibility of alternative conceptual schemes, the denial of skepticism, first person authority, the inscrutability of reference, etc.

Fodor and I challenged him on his impoverished database, by which he meant, basically, individuals holding true a set of sentences under specifiable circumstances, and we also defended at least the coherence of a Chomskian linguistic nativism and further, a significant toolbox of well-worn presumptions about theory construction. We thereby block any apriority inference to his cherished views.

Ludwig and I took a different route in our two books on Davidson, arguing that the resultant indeterminacy that the possibility of radical interpretation ensured is not as harmless as Davidson presumed (he, e.g., misleadingly compares indeterminacy of interpretation to the differences between Fahrenheit and Celsius temperature measurement scales), rendering interpretation from the position of the radical interpreter impossible. The chief take home message from both critical works is that the philosopher should not set epistemic constraints on successful theory construction; something we should have learned from the failure of the positivist program.

12. In an interview Donald Davidson gave you in 1995, he argues that: «The internalist says that the contents of our thoughts, our beliefs, Our desires, our intentions, and what we mean by what we say, are entirely determined by what is inside our heads [...] the externalist, on the contrary, argues that there are factors external to the person that are determinative of the contents of our thoughts». Externalism, then, concerns the biography of the subject and his or her training and is the necessary premise for radical interpretation (Davidson 1967, 1973). What are your definitions of "externalist" and "internalist"?

EL: Davidson abhorred philosophical labels, especially ones imposed on him, e.g., the realism/anti-realism debate. Partly, his distaste derived from his not sharing the underlying assumptions behind the standard usage of these labels. The externalism/internalism debate is a case in point. The idea that the meanings of our words are determined by factors outside of our minds appealed to Davidson from early on. But we mustn't forget that Davidson was also a holist about meaning (determination), and so, while a causal correlation between the world and a speaker is significant in fixing meaning, it cannot be the whole story. To be honest, I could never satisfactorily figure out how to reconcile the demands of (meaning) holism with the demands of externalism. This partly explains I abandoned holism in my co-authored (with Fodor) book *Holism: a shopper's guide* (1991).

13. The triangularity of communicative experience involving a first subject, a second subject, and the external world is, according to Davidson, a necessary but not sufficient condition for having thought. The two subjects, in fact, must be united not by a simple interaction but by a communication of a linguistic nature. Thought and language are interdependent. There can be no thought without language and no language without thought. What is your position on the relationship between thought and language?

EL: I'm embarrassed to say here that I have no clear well thought out position on this topic. This may account for why I stopped doing the metaphysics of mind some twenty years ago and now work exclusively in philosophy of language.

14. Donald Davidson's epistemology looks at the thought of individuals as the result of circular relationships between at least two people and a series of shared events. From this it follows that truth is "circular", "indeterminate", "holistic". Thought, language, beliefs, propositional attitudes, intentions are continually confirmed or denied on the basis of their actual use. Truth is therefore indeterminate because it is the result of multiple interpretations. What do you think?

EL: My own view is that truth isn't indeterminate, even if one has to fix the linguist bearer by interpreting it.

15. With "anomalous monism" Davidson wants to propose a solution to mind-body problem. Davidson in Mental events *(1970) explains your terms as follows: «monism in that it claims that mental events are physical events; anomalous in that it insists on the fact that events, when described in psychological terms, do not fall under strict or restricted laws». The mental therefore has an anomalous character and a propositional content. Mental phenomena reveal not only the anomalous character of the mental, since randomness has a marginal role in their realization, but also how important it is that subjects are autonomous and how necessary educational action is. Does the mental also have an anomalous character a là Davidson?*

EL: As for your question, I'm happy enough that there are no strict laws governing intentional states described in respect of mental properties, but you ask after the Davidson quotation I'm not sure I understand. So, my quick answer to your question is that I endorse the quotation but am not sure about the follow up. Put more modestly, I am not sure the follow up is a correct way to spell out the anomalousness Davidson is getting at.

16. Remembering Jerry Fodor you wrote: «We spent oodles and oodles of time together writing a couple books and dozens of articles on a range of topics - holism, compositionality, context sensitivity, the lexicon, analyticity, Davidson, Quine, even supervaluations!». What was the topic that you were most complicit in writing about?

EL: I wish I could say our attack on meaning holism but as a matter of fact I entered that project a wholehearted holist. I would have to say the essays collected in our "The Compositionality Papers" reflect broadly my views, e.g., about compositionality, reverse compositionality and productivity even before Jerry and I collaborated.

17. Still remembering your friend Jerry Fodor you write: «When I started the "What is cognitive science?" lecture series at Rutgers in the mid-90's, Jerry was, of course, the inaugural speaker. To a packed house he began, "Cognitive Science was a pretty good idea; too bad it just didn't work out"- obviously not what the audience was hoping to hear». Do you think so too?

EL: To be honest, even though I have been a member of the Cognitive Science Center at Rutgers for over a quarter of a century and from time to time even its director, I'd like to say that I don't know what Cognitive

Science is. What made it possible for me to collaborate on a book and numerous articles with Fodor is that all our collaborations are critical. It turned out we could collaborate even if we did not share positive views, e.g., about the metaphysics of content; or the nature of the mind; or the structure of concepts. For many years it was thought by many philosophers that I must agree with Fodor about atomism or the representational theory of mind, but, as a matter of fact, I did not. So, in answer to your question about what do I think is the future of cognitive science I'd have to say I have no idea. It does seem to me that, contrary to Fodor's wishes — and the wishes of many sensible people—, cognitive science is moving in the direction of neuroscience—something by the way Fodor regretted but predicted. This may be partly explained by the retirement of so many of the giants in cognitive science. It may also be partly because neuroscientists seem to be taking a more cognitive turn—at least in terminology. Put less optimistically, it's also because people want shortcuts, and the neuro stuff sidesteps the difficult questions about what's really going on. Witness the ubiquity of self-proclaimed 'cognitive neuroscience'. However, both these surmisals are driven more by anecdotal observations rather than a hard look at the current status and aims of cognitive scientists; and so, they must be taken with a grain of salt.

18. Jerry Fodor was 40 years old when he wrote his The Language of Thought. *What do you think was the overall impact of Fodor and his ideas on the academic world?*

EL: There are many ways to measure Fodor's impact, but some numbers just jump out:
1) He has as many academic citations as any other philosopher – well over a 100K. His modularity of mind book alone — which he told me he thought was his best and most important work— has more than 15K citations! His H-index it nearly 100—that's about twice as many as any other philosopher I can think of (again, discounting philosophers like Foucault and Sartre, who wrote for a general audience as well). Add to this that none of his books are written for a lay audience, which can result in a lot of citations but not by professionals. It was clear to me and my colleagues that he completely dominated discussions in philosophy of mind in the 80's, 90's into the aughts. It's hard to imagine a paper published in philosophy of mind that didn't at least reference him. I would say, flat out, that he was easily and by far the most influential person in philosophy of mind in the second half of

the 20th century—both for people who agreed with him and those that did not. In addition, Rutgers was able to build a world class group of cognitive scientists from, linguistics, psychology, philosophy, and computer science largely because of his presence.

19. And now that Fodor is gone, will you share a personal memory of yours with us?

EL: I always thought of Jerry as a big brother; a case in point goes back to the early '90s when Jerry and I gave a paper critical of Paul Churchland's work on state space semantics at a cognitive science conference at Washington University in St Louis. I had sent our paper to Paul months in advance since he was to be our commentator, but even after several prods we never received any comments in advance on our paper. Indeed, in his last communication he had told me he would not prepare anything in advance and that he would just "wing it" in the discussion following our presentation. Meanwhile, it became clear on the first day of the conference that Jerry did not want to be there. Our paper was the last one of the conference on its third and final day and Jerry had long gone mute in a not so subtle tell-tale of what he thought of the conference.

Our session began in a huge auditorium jam packed with scientists. Just the sort of people Paul was talking to and Jerry avoided like the plague. I gave our talk and Paul, who recall had told me he was going to wing it, got up and told the IT person to start his presentation, which required dimming the lights, setting in motion a video and power point, with various auditory data as well. It really was quite magnificent. In his comment I discerned three critical points against our paper. I know this because he told us as much. To the best of my abilities, I could articulate the first two objections and even offer a counter to them, but the third objection flew right over my head, and I had no idea how I could usefully respond. It involved many sorts of formalism I had never even seen before.

When Paul finished, the IT person undimmed the lights and I could see Jerry still looking rather glum and disinterested, and so, I resigned myself to being embarrassed but still decided to try as best as I could to reply to Paul, all the while internally fretting over the moment I would have to say to the assembled collection of scientists I had no answer to Paul's third objection. At that point, I started to rise when all of a sudden Jerry's arm, fully extended, gently pushed me back gently into my seat, and said in a voice I swear sounded like John Wayne's, 'I got this,' while barking at the IT

person to dim the lights and rerun Paul's show. Needless to say, I was delighted to find myself once again in my safety net.

Jerry began by declaring that Paul had three arguments against us. (I thought so too.) He proceeded to lay out the first argument and then the second and replied to both. (I had recognized the same two arguments and had in mind the same replies.) And then he grumbled, "as for your third argument, I didn't understand it". (I didn't need Jerry to confess that.) But then as only he could inimitably add, "and neither did you Paul!" (And *that* is something I never could have done.) He then proceeded to explain why Paul' third argument was nonsense, mere mumbo-jumbo cake walking. A raucous exchange erupted, and about an hour into it we were forced to leave for the airport. I still smile thinking back to Jerry banging it out even as we raced up the steps to the exit, never conceding a point. My big brother Jerry! Oh, how I miss him.

References

Armstrong J., 2016, «The Problem of Lexical Innovation», *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 39, pp. 87-118.

Burge T., 1979, «Individualism and the Mental», *Midwest studies in philosophy*, 4, pp. 73-121.

Cappelen H., 2018, *Fixing language: An essay on conceptual engineering,* Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Carston R., 2002, «Linguistic meaning, communicated meaning and cognitive pragmatics», *Mind & Language*, 17(1-2), pp. 127-148.

Davidson D., 1967, «Truth and meaning», in Kulas J., Fetzer J.H., Rankin T.L. (eds.), *Philosophy, Language, and Artificial Intelligence*, Dordrecht, Springer, pp. 93-111.

Davidson D., 1973, «Radical interpretation», *Dialectica*, 27, 3-4, pp. 313-328.

Davidson D., 1986, «A coherence theory of truth and knowledge», in Ernest Sosa, Jaekwon Kim, Jeremy Fantl, Matthew McGrath (eds.), *Epistemology: an anthology*, Hoboken, Wiley–Blackwell, pp. 124-133.

Davidson, D., 2013, «Mental Events», in *Readings in Philosophy of Psychology, Volume I*, Harvard University Press, pp. 107-119.

Devitt M., Sterelny K., 1999, *Language and reality: An introduction to the philosophy of language*, Cambridge (Mass.), MIT Press.

Fodor J., Lepore E., 1991, *Holism: a shopper's guide*, Hoboken, Wiley–Blackwell.

Fodor J. A., Lepore, E. 2002, *The compositionality papers*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Haslanger S., 2012, *Resisting reality: Social construction and social critique*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Haslanger, S., 2018, «What is a social practice?», *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements*, 82, pp. 231-247.

Kripke S.A., 1980, *Naming and Necessity: Lectures Given to the Princeton University Philosophy Colloquium*, Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press.

Lepore E., Ludwig K., 2005, *Donald Davidson: Meaning, truth, language, and reality*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Lepore, E., Stone, M. 2014, *Imagination and convention: Distinguishing grammar and inference in language*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Lewis D., 2008, *Convention: A philosophical study*, Hoboken, Wiley-Blackwell.

Ludlow, P., 2008, «Cheap contextualism», *Philosophical Issues*, 18, pp. 104-129.

Ludlow P., 2014, *Living Words*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Putnam, H., 1975, «The meaning of "Meaning"», in *Language, mind, and knowledge. Minnesota studies in the philosophy of science*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 7, pp. 131-193.

Plunkett, D., Sundell, T., 2013, «Disagreement and the semantics of normative and evaluative terms», *Philosopher's Imprint*, 13(23), pp. 1-37.