

Barry Lee, ed.
Philosophy of Language: The Key Thinkers.
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Recent interest in the philosophy of language has resulted in a number of scholarly publications, including textbooks and compendia. The book edited by Lee provides an introduction to 12 modern key thinkers in—or influencing—the field of philosophy in general, and the philosophy of language in particular: Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein (two separate chapters), Rudolf Carnap, John L. Austin, Willard Van Orman Quine, Noam Chomsky, Paul Grice, Donald Davidson, Michael Dummett, Saul Kripke, and Jacques Derrida.

Barry Lee in his Introduction (1–32) provides an overview of principle issues in the philosophy of language, selecting *meaning* as the key concept of investigation. This decision results in posing the following questions: ‘What is it for words to have meaning?; How do words mean what they do?; What is it for a speaker to understand an expression or know a language?; How is linguistic communication possible?; How can it be that words have publicly accessible meanings?’ (3) In his introduction, Lee discusses some possible answers to these questions as well as different accounts of meaning, while other answers become clear in the chapters on individual thinkers. Other issues briefly mentioned in the introduction include consequences for the study of meaning following from logical empiricism, Quine’s holism, different accounts of language proposed by Wittgenstein, Austin, Chomsky, and Derrida, Gricean investigations into the border between semantics and pragmatics, Davidson’s truth theory and thesis on radical interpretation, and Dummett’s views on theories of meaning. Finally, Lee observes that: ‘The nature of the book means that [the reader] should view it as an entry-point to the debates it introduces. To arrive at a considered view of the issues, [the reader] will need to read, and think, further—exploring primary texts, following up on suggestions for further secondary reading, and reflecting carefully on the arguments’ (28).

In Chapter 1 Michael Beaney presents the achievement of Gottlob Frege. He starts with observing that though Frege was primarily a mathematician, logician and philosopher of mathematics, by inventing modern logic and attempting to demonstrate that arithmetic can be reduced to logic, ‘he was led to reflect on how language works, and the ideas he introduced in doing so laid the foundations for the development of philosophy of language, especially within the analytic tradition’ (33). Beaney very concisely discusses the key issues in Fregean semantics—the function-argument analysis, the distinction between subordination and subsumption, the fundamental distinction between object and concept, identity statements, types of context, compositionality, and, obviously, the sense and reference of names, sentences and concept-words.

Chapter 2 is devoted to Bertrand Russell. Kenneth Taylor discusses the logico-semantic distinction introduced by Russell between proper names and definite descriptions, and the epistemic distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description. As observed by Taylor ‘on that pair of distinctions, Russell rested the thesis that every proposition

that we are capable of understanding must be wholly composed of constituents with which we are directly acquainted' (56). Taylor recapitulates Russell's theory of descriptions (within both the historical and contemporary context), and observes that fundamental insight about the difference between names and descriptions retains much of its validity, in philosophy of language and linguistics. Russell's epistemological claim, on the other hand, fares less well, and there is no reason 'to insist that direct reference to an object, in either thought or talk, require that we stand in the kind of intimate cognitive relation to it that Russell imagined we must' (73).

Chapters 3 and 6, both by Arif Ahmed, are devoted to Ludwig Wittgenstein, the former to the *Tractatus*, the latter to the *Philosophical Investigations*. It is a very difficult task to present the ideas contained in the *Tractatus* in a concise way; Ahmed decides on issues such as elementary propositions, complex propositions, and the picture theory of meaning, he notes though that his 'very brief account has been necessarily both lacunary and dogmatic' (83). The topics focused on by Wittgenstein which have direct and indirect bearing on philosophy of language, but not discussed in this chapter, include the theory of types, the nature of mathematics, and the nature of philosophy in general. Ahmed's discussion of the ideas present in the *Philosophical Investigations*, 'the monument of the new philosophy' (122), is far more comprehensive and provides interesting observations on family resemblance, rule following, and private language. Ahmed not only critically recapitulates Wittgenstein's theses, but also mentions different contemporary interpretations. In his view 'it is in Quine's work on language that Wittgenstein's best insights into it have found clearest and fullest expression' (135). Since the next chapter (to be discussed below) focuses on Quine, the reader has a chance to appreciate the originality of Ahmed's claim.

In Chapter 4 Pierre Wagner comments on the achievement of Rudolf Carnap and his contribution to the meta-linguistic turn in philosophy. Carnap was concerned especially with the use of logical methods for the analysis of sentences and terms in science and metaphysics, and the properties of language systems applicable to the construction of scientific theories. In the conclusion to this chapter, Wagner comments that 'Carnap's position has often been misinterpreted as descriptive talk about facts, whereas what he has to say needs to be understood in terms of explication, replacement and language planning' (98).

The obvious thinker to be discussed in between early and late Wittgenstein is John L. Austin. Guy Longworth looks at his views of the role of the study of language in philosophy and stresses that Austin cared about language for two reasons: 'First, language-use is a central part of human activity, so it's an important topic in its own right. Second, the study of language is an aide (...) to the pursuit of philosophical topics' (104). Next, Longworth discusses Austin's views about the relation between language and truth, and his concept and classification of speech acts. An important part of this chapter is devoted to 'responses to Austin', where Longworth mentions concerns raised by Quine, the contribution of Grice, whose 'work has played a central role in the negative reception of the core of Austin's work' (118), and finally criticism offered by Derrida. Surprisingly, the seminal work on speech acts by John Searle (Austin's student at Oxford) is not mentioned at all.

As already mentioned, Chapter 7 (following the discussion of later Wittgenstein) is devoted to W. V. O. Quine. Gary Kemp opens this chapter observing that 'Quine is routinely

mentioned as one of the most important figures in post-WWII philosophy of language. Yet on the face of it, his views were almost entirely negative, with few philosophers of language today subscribing to them' (138). Kemp attempts to show the reasons for this paradox, and arrives at the conclusion that 'much of Quine's influence is a matter of provoking responses' (155). He discusses Quine's reaction to Carnap's philosophy, his views on empiricism, and the principal aims of his naturalism, 'to explain the core use of language (...) *strictly within the causal realm of scientific psychology*' (144). Important sections of the chapter discuss the famous indeterminacy of translation thesis and Quine's views on truth and ontological relativity.

Chapter 8 is devoted to Noam Chomsky, the only linguist among the 'key thinkers' presented. The 'linguist's approach' in contrast to the 'philosopher's approach' is most clearly visible in the treatment and analyses of language data, and in the case of Chomsky, this concerns particularly syntactic data, with his early transformation-generative grammar offering a new and revolutionary approach to syntactic analysis. John Collins concentrates in his chapter on the more recent changes in the generative paradigm but also looks at the constant threads in Chomskyan linguistics—autonomy of language and syntax, naturalism and internalism, where internalism is 'a thesis about states of the brain theoretically individuated to enter into an explanation of stable linguistic phenomena' (176). Very interestingly, this chapter includes a section on 'thought experiments', with reference to appropriate studies by Hilary Putnam and Tyler Burge. Collins stresses that results of such experiments do not necessarily confirm the basic tenets of externalism.

In Chapter 9, Kent Bach introduces Paul Grice and his achievements connected with the study of meaning, the immensely influential differentiation between linguistic and speaker meaning, the account of the cooperative principle, conversational maxims and conversational implicature. Bach shows how Grice repudiated Wittgenstein's 'meaning as use' approach by emphasizing on explanations in terms of *both* meaning and use. Bach also mentions common misconceptions about conversational implicature and maxims, observing that maxims 'do not determine implicatures but, rather facilitate their communication' (191), and stressing that linguistic expressions do not implicate things, whereas speakers do (192). Throughout the chapter Bach makes it clear why Grice's work has had lasting impact on philosophy, linguistics, and psychology but also computer science, literary theory, aesthetics, and epistemology.

In Chapter 10, Kirk Ludwig focuses on Donald Davidson and his two principal contributions within philosophy of language: his model of truth-theoretic semantics, and the theory of radical interpretation. Davidson proposed to use Tarski-style truth theory for the purposes of a compositional meaning theory, and he argued that 'natural languages are compositional because they have an infinity of non-synonymous sentences but are mastered by finite beings' (201). Radical interpretation is a successor to Quine's project of radical translation, but whereas Quine's 'radical translator aims to produce a translation manual, the radical interpreter seeks to confirm an interpretative truth theory' (213). Ludwig notes that Davidson's proposal that insight into meaning in natural languages 'can be obtained by reflection on how to construct and to confirm axiomatic truth theories for them has been hugely influential' (220). Radical interpretation, on the other hand, has been more controversial, as it deals with a fundamental issue in thinking about the relation of thought and language to the world, namely,

whether the concepts we use to describe these are properly thought of as deployed in the first instance from the third-person point of view' (220).

The late Michael Dummett, discussed by Bernhard Weiss in Chapter 11, is not only an important contemporary philosopher but also a distinguished Frege scholar. His own approach to philosophy in general, and philosophy of language in particular is strongly influenced by Fregean thought, especially in connection with semantic theory. At the same time, however, Dummett rejects the 'underlying realism that permeates Frege's thinking' (225) and objectivity of senses, and under the influence of Wittgenstein, sees senses 'as established through speakers' use of terms in a publicly accessible realm' (225), and hence considers senses intersubjective. Weiss repeats Dummett's claim that the philosophy of language is the foundation of all other philosophy, and discusses both the underlying assumptions and consequences of this thesis.

The achievement of Saul Kripke covers numerous issues in different aspects of philosophy and logic (especially modal logic). Bryan Frances concentrates on two areas only: Kripke's challenge to the Fregean paradigm (regarding meaning and reference), and his work on the metaphysics of meaning; he also briefly mentions Kripke's theses regarding names and possible world semantics, and his reading of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. Frances observes that what is known as *Kripkenstein* 'is interesting regardless of whether he's the real Wittgenstein' (262). This remark echoes Ahmed's note in an earlier chapter: 'The most philosophically engaging discussion (which is however quite dubious as an interpretation) is certainly Saul Kripke's *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*' (136).

The last chapter is devoted to Jacques Derrida. Thomas Baldwin concentrates on Derrida's early writings, influenced by Husserl's phenomenological approach. In his early studies Derrida claimed that 'Husserl's account of the meaning of expressive signs is fundamentally mistaken; where Husserl holds that this meaning is based upon isolated, non-communicative, mental acts, Derrida maintains that it is essentially dependent on communicative practices in which signs are repeated' (273). Contemporary linguistics would consider both views as highly speculative, unsupported by any empirical evidence. In further sections Baldwin briefly introduces the notions of difference and deconstruction, hallmarks of Derridean thought.

Every ranking list, every publication devoted to 'key figures', is by necessity selective and incomplete. The most visible omissions from the discussed volume include such names as Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jürgen Habermas, Richard Rorty, and John Searle. Especially the omission of Searle, the author of—among other highly influential studies—the seminal *Speech Acts. An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (1969), is most difficult to explain in a volume devoted to the philosophy of language.

Though cross-referencing throughout the volume is rather limited, it is nevertheless possible to trace the lineage of certain ideas and patterns of influence, especially visible with the (analytic) thread from Frege, through Carnap, and Quine to Davidson. All chapters are furnished with notes, recommendation for further reading and bibliography, making the book a most helpful—and critical—guide for the beginners, but at the same time also valuable for philosophers and linguists with interest in philosophy.

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