

Margaret Cameron and **Robert J. Stainton**, eds. *Linguistic Content: New Essays on the History of Philosophy of Language*. Oxford University Press 2015. 280 pp. \$66.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN ISBN 9780198732495).

History, philosophy, and language were my main interests as an undergraduate. I even considered focusing on the history of philosophy of language in graduate school. So I was looking forward to, and was (happily) rewarded by, this volume.

Linguistic Content: New Essays on the History of Philosophy of Language is an anthology of twelve essays on particular Western historical figures or schools, preceded by a substantive introductory essay by the editors. The essays cover much of the Western tradition, beginning with Plato and ending with Franz Brentano's student Anton Marty, and include one essay on Medieval Islamic philosophy. They are suited for those with a background in philosophy of language, though not necessarily in the particular historical figure or school discussed.

Other than in the Introduction (more below), readers get little overview of themes or trends in the Western history of philosophy of language. Perhaps that is as it should be for an anthology. For that reason, I would recommend individual essays to people interested in their particular topics. I would recommend the volume in its entirety to anyone interested in a collection of high-quality individual essays.

I will spend the majority of this review on the individual essays. Because there are so many, I have tilted toward summary. But let me make one more general remark. Besides learning much about the history of philosophy of language, reading this volume also reminded me of the different approaches to the history of philosophy generally. While they are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive, I counted four approaches in the volume:

1. *historical*, emphasizing presenting over evaluating;
2. *philosophical*, emphasizing both presenting and evaluating;
3. *exegetical*, emphasizing the interpretation of individual words; and
4. *cultural*, emphasizing cultural context.

In the Introduction, Margaret Cameron and Robert J. Stainton present an overview of the history of (Western) philosophy of language and the essays in their volume. They introduce 'two questions that emerge repeatedly as unifying themes' (p. 1).

Q1: What varieties of linguistic content did the author or period countenance?

Q2: What metaphysical groundings for linguistic content were considered? (p. 1)

Cameron and Stainton subdivide those questions and offer possible responses. Their Introduction is rigorous and helpful.

In 'Method, Meaning, and Ontology in Plato's Philosophy of Language', Deborah Mordrak tends toward approach no. 1 above. She does so by arguing that Plato's early dialogues attempt to find ordinary-language definitions for abstract terms. Many middle dialogues appeal to the Forms to

provide idealized, normative definitions. The *Cratylus* investigates whether names are correct naturally or conventionally. The *Sophist* investigates the method of division, where a definition is determined by finding increasingly general terms under which it falls. The *Theaetetus* investigates epistemological questions and yields semantic results. Reading Plato as a philosopher of language proves persuasive and perspicuous.

In ‘Names, Verbs, and Sentences in Ancient Greek Philosophy’, Francesco Ademollo tends toward approach no. 3. He investigates Plato’s and Aristotle’s conceptions of semantic compositionality by arguing that, while ‘*onomata*’ should be translated as ‘names’, ‘*rhemata*’ should be translated as ‘verbs’. Ademollo marshals evidence for his view against opponents. Though careful, he is engaging in an exegetical debate that outsiders might not find interesting.

In ‘On What is Said: The Stoics and Peter Abelard’, Margaret Cameron tends toward approach no. 1 by comparing the Stoics’ (c. 3rd century B.C.E. to 6th century C.E.) notion of *lekton*, or what is sayable, with Peter Abelard’s (1079–1142) notion of *dictum*, or what is said. Cameron claims no historical connection. Instead he explains that *lekta* are a kind of linguistic content, including propositions, syllogisms, and enquiries (distinct from questions, with only ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers). Distancing themselves from Plato, the Stoics meant *lekta* to be logical rather than ontological. Similarly, Cameron explains, Abelard took *dicta* to be propositional content, which, like *lekta*, was also logical. Cameron’s analysis is interesting, but I wonder how useful it is to compare only coincidentally similar yet historically disconnected views.

In ‘Philosophy of Language in the Medieval Arabic Tradition’, Peter Adamson and Alexander Key tend toward approach no. 4. They describe the cultural clash that occurred from the seventh to the eleventh centuries between the autochthonous Arabic grammatical tradition, which distinguished vocal from mental content, and the imported Aristotelian logical tradition, which distinguished sounds, thoughts, and things. Adamson and Key arrange their article around an incident in 937 or 938 when the vizier Ibn al-Furāt (d. 938), sitting in the Baghdad court, summoned the logician Abū Bishr Mattā (d. 940) to defend the claim that logic is necessary to know truth against criticisms to the contrary voiced by the grammarian Abū Sa‘īd al-Sīrāfī (d. 979). I learned much.

In ‘Those “Funny Words”: Medieval Theories of Syncategorematic Terms’, Joke Spruyt and Catarina Dutilh Novaes tend toward approach no. 2 when considering thirteenth and fourteenth century views on syncategorematic terms. Such terms, including logical operators, modals, and quantifiers, are thought not to contribute semantically to sentences directly. Spruyt and Novaes compare those medieval views to contemporary ones, asking whether our conception of logic is worth preserving. I appreciate their question and hope that others will too.

In ‘Semantic Content in Aquinas and Ockham’, Gyula Klima tends toward approach no. 2 by comparing views of semantic content in Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) and William of Ockham (c. 1287–1347) with Hilary Putnam’s (1926–2016) externalism. Klima argues that Ockham distinguishes between phenomenal and semantic content, where the former, which is internal, is disconnected from the latter, which is external. Klima then contends that on that view, as on Putnam’s, external-world skepticism is unintelligible. Klima next argues that Aquinas’ Aristotelian view of content, according to which the object of thought is formally identical with the object perceived,

likewise entails its unintelligibility. Though this essay is more philosophical, its arguments are (likely because of space) less rigorous than one might have wanted.

In 'Meaning and Linguistic Usage in Renaissance Humanism: The Case of Lorenzo Valla', Lodi Nauta tends toward approach no. 4 by focusing on the eponymous Renaissance humanist (c. 1406–57). Valla's program 'was one of rediscovery and reappropriation of the riches of antiquity' (136), which involved mastering Greek and Latin. Valla expressed particular philosophical views, including that determining a word's meaning requires looking not at abstract rules but at ordinary uses *but* that ordinary uses need to be confined to classical texts. Nauta makes a good case that humanists and others on the edges of philosophy of language nevertheless contribute to it.

In 'Medieval Theories of Signification to John Locke', E. Jennifer Ashworth tends toward approach no. 1 by considering thirteenth to seventeenth century theories of signification. She mentions over a dozen philosophers, from Aquinas to Martin Smiglecius (1564–1618), considering how each interpreted Aristotle's 'semantic triangle' of word, concept, and thing. More historical than most, the article does a good job in its limited space to review many thinkers.

In 'Locke on the Names of Modes', Benjamin Hill tends toward approach no. 1 by defending the claim that Locke created 'a brand-new kind of linguistic act' (176), viz., naming and thereby creating the idea of particular modes. Modes are like qualities, except that they apply only to individual substances. Mathematical and moral ideas are modes, as are ideas like jealousy, recollecting, and tumbling. Locke, Hill claims, makes epistemology parasitic on language. Though Hill considers other ways of reading Locke, he has convinced me that his is correct.

In 'Herder's Doctrine of Meaning as Use', Michael N. Forster tends toward approach no. 2. He argues that J. G. Herder (1744–1803) held that meaning is use. Forster then considers the form that such a doctrine should take. He appeals to Herder to champion semantic atomism over holism; Wittgenstein and family resemblance over explicit rules; Herder and sociality being functional *for* over being essential *to* meaning; and Herder and psychologism over behaviorism. Sometimes, I think Forster is right, we move a theory forward by reading history back.

In 'Thomas Reid on Language', Patrick Rysiew tends toward approach no. 1 by arguing that Reid has elements of ordinary language philosophy, a pragmatic account of meaning, and a direct-reference theory of names. Since all are mainstays of 20th century philosophy of language, this makes Reid interesting. Since, to my knowledge, all three are never combined in any single 20th century account, this makes Reid noteworthy—and this essay a worthwhile contribution.

Finally, in 'Meaning in Action: Anton Marty's Pragmatic Semantics', Laurent Cesalli tends toward approach no. 1 by focusing on Franz Brentano's student Anton Marty (1847–1914). While Brentano makes intentionality essential to psychology, Marty makes it essential to meaning. Nonetheless, Marty subdivides meaning into broader and narrower senses. The broader sense is pragmatic, insofar as it concerns what speakers intend hearers to understand. The narrower is referential. Thus, Cesalli claims, Marty offers a hybrid theory of 'pragmatic semantics'. I am unsure whether Cesalli's theory is workable, but Marty has convinced me that it is worth investigating.