

REVIEW

A.P. Martinich (ed.), *The Philosophy of Language*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990 (second edition).

Philosophers and thinkers in general have been interested in language for a long period and for various reasons. Therefore much has been written and published about the subject. So it is not an easy thing to find one's way through a multitude of books and articles concerning the issue. Especially as most of the (numerous) authors have their own points of view, their own theories too, about the outcomes of many controversial questions.

The second edition of *The Philosophy of Language*, edited by A.P. Martinich, is a compendium and a guidebook to the different interpretations and contentious topics, and it gives a wonderful aggregate of the existing opinions about language and its analytic principles in general. Therefore the book is an excellent instrument for a person who is interested in that type of philosophy, and it is particularly useful for students in the field.

The Philosophy of Language has seven sections: I. *Truth and meaning*, II. *Speech acts*, III. *Reference and descriptions*, IV. *Names and demonstratives*, V. *Propositional attitudes*, VI. *Metaphor*, VII. *The nature of language*.

In each of these the reader finds the most significant authors on the matter and the most interesting publications on the major items. To give an idea what kind of articles one finds, we will review the first two sections of the book: *Truth and meaning* and *Speech acts*. Of the other parts a rough summary will be given.

Section I, *Truth and meaning*. Carl Hempel in *Empirical criteria of cognitive significance: problems and changes* discusses the theory of logical positivism, according to which a sentence is meaningful just in case it is (a) analytic or contradictory or (b) verifiable or confirmable by experience. One purpose of this view was to have a criterion that would exclude certain traditional philosophical problems or solutions from scientific philosophy. As Hempel clearly and cogently shows, the criterion is both too strong and too weak. It excludes some elements that logical positivists wanted to include as philosophy and include some that they would not want to. Hempel argues that "the content of a statement with empirical import cannot, in general, be exhaustively expressed by means of any class of observation sentences". Further, "the cognitive meaning of a statement in an empirical language is reflected in the totality of

its logical relationships to all other statements in that language and not to observation sentences alone". Although Hempel is critical of the standard formulations of the empiricist criterion of meaning, he is sympathetic with the overall project.

A more unrelenting critique of empiricism is W.V. Quine's *Two dogmas of empiricism*, an attack on the alleged distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions. Questions of meaning seem to be different from questions of facts. Questions of meaning concern analyticity, synonymy, and entailment. Questions of fact concern the way the world is, not how we talk about the world. Quine challenges these seemingly unchallengeable views. He claims that there is no firm distinction between fact and meaning. Quine's results do not entail that there can be no theory of meaning, although they do impose restrictions on what will count as an adequate theory.

Tarski's article, *The semantic conception of truth*, is an informal presentation of Tarski's technical paper *The notion of truth in formalized languages*, which presented a way of rigorously treating the concept of truth within language itself.

Alonzo Church in *The need for abstract entities in semantic analysis* presents a formal semantics for natural languages, which, though an alternative to Tarski's, still satisfies the same rigorous conditions.

Donald Davidson extends Tarski's words by asserting that a theory of truth for a language is at the same time a theory of meaning. H.P. Grice's theory of meaning is pragmatic in the sense that he takes as basic the notion of the utterer's meaning, what it is for a person to mean something by an utterance. Sentence meaning is derivative in the sense that it will be analyzed in terms of utterer's meaning. It is also important to distinguish between utterer's meaning and speaker's meaning. Utterer's meaning is the broader notion. It is whatever a person who tries to communicate something to another person means, no matter whether the utterance takes the form of a gesture, a token, or words. Speaker meaning is what a person means who tries to communicate something by uttering words. P.F. Strawson weighs the evidence between a semantic and pragmatic approach to meaning in *Meaning and truth*. He sides with Grice and against Davidson in arguing that to say something true, is for a speaker to mean something, and hence the notion of a true statement must be analyzed in terms of what a speaker means.

Section II, *Speech acts*. The first to study the issue explicitly and at length was J.B. Austin in *Performative utterances*. He introduces the idea that to say something is to do something. He argues dialectically against the logical positivists who held

that a sentence is meaningful only if it has a truth-value. Austin show that there are perfectly ordinary meaningful sentences that are neither true nor false. Austin presented a tentative though relatively comprehensive theory of speech acts in *How to do things with words*.

John Searle substantially revised that theory and presented what has become the standard theory of speech acts. His article *What is a speech act?* sketches the central portions of that theory. Zeno Vendler does not follow Searle but revises and extends in his own way Austin's view about what it is to say something. Vendler's work is highly influenced by Noam Chomsky's transformational grammar. He lauds Austin for intuitively discovering conceptual patterns that are verified by empirically based linguistic theory. Vendler then relates the structure of what is said to the structure of our thought.

What is said is just one part of what a speaker communicates. Much, perhaps most, of what is communicated is implied in one way or another. Although this is a kind of commonplace, it had not been incorporated into a theory of meaning until Grice sketched the main types of implication and roughly characterized them in his William James Lectures for 1967, titled *Logic and conversation*. His theory also has substantial applications to traditional philosophical problems.

The central kind of implication is conversational implication. One kind of conversational implication involves indirect speech acts, which are speech act that result from the performance of some other speech acts. For example, the explicit speech act performed by saying "Can you pass the salt?" is a question ("Are you able to...?"); yet, at a dinner table it is typically used to make a request. The explicit speech act performed by saying "You are standing on my feet" is a statement, yet it is too sometimes used to request that a person get off the speaker's feet. Searle's analysis of these indirect speech acts is an extension of his theory of speech acts and had a place within Grice's theory of conversation.

Because of its unprecedented character, Grice's statement of his theory in *Logic and conversation* contains some easily identifiable and easily correctable errors. For example, he distinguishes between four ways in which a conversational maxim can go unfulfilled:

- (1) By violating a maxim
- (2) By opting out of a maxim
- (3) By flouting a maxim
- (4) By being faced with a clash of maxims.

The first, violating a maxim, is a specific way of not fulfilling a

maxim in a broad sense. It is to quietly and unconstentatiously not fulfilling a maxim. But Grice sometimes mistakenly uses "violate" where he should have used the broader term, "not fulfill".

Also it is clear that (4) does not belong with (1)-(3). (4) is not a way in which a maxim can go unfulfilled. Rather, it is a reason why a maxim might go unfulfilled. If a speaker is faced with a clash of two maxims, that is, a situation in which he can fulfill one or the other but not both, then he will have to sacrifice one in order to fulfill the other. Thus, in being faced with a clash, the speaker may violate, opt out of, or flout one of the maxims.

It is plausible that these remaining three maxims need to be supplemented with a fourth. Just as violating a maxim is complemented by flouting a maxim, that is, openly and ostentatiously not fulfilling one, opting out of a maxim seems to have a complement. Opting out of a maxim is temporarily not accepting the force of a maxim. A person might opt out of the maxim of saying as much as is required by an interlocutor when a person must keep a secret. Thus, to the remaining three possibilities, we might add *suspending* a maxim, that is, permanently not accepting the force of a maxim in certain situations. For example, because the United States Senate allows filibustering, it suspends the maxim of relevance; and because it also does not allow a senator to be prosecuted for anything he says on the Senate floor, it suspends the maxim of quality: "Say what is true".

Robert Stalnaker provides a different sort of approach to pragmatics in his essay. He is interested in handling pragmatic phenomena within a model theoretic system. An important element of that system is the notion of a possible world. The intuitive idea behind a possible world is that the way the world actually is could have been different; it is possible that the world might have been different. This idea of a different world is the foundation for the notion of possible worlds.

Section III concerns the single most discussed issue in the philosophy of language: *Reference*. Reference is very important because some philosophers typically think that the principal way in which language attaches to reality is through reference. This is presupposed in most of the selections in this section. The central issue of debate is whether reference is a semantic or pragmatic notion.

Section IV concerns a topic related to reference: *Names and demonstratives* are paradigmatic kinds of expressions that refer or are used to refer. What are names? What are demonstratives? How do they attach to reality?

In Section V a different problem is discussed. What people say is often the expression of a belief. Philosophers have wondered what the objects of belief are. This question can be put in linguistic mode: they have wondered what the object of "it is raining" and "the cat is on the mat" is when they are preceded by the phrase "believes that". There are puzzles here that seem to show that a clause occurring after the phrase "believes that" cannot refer to the same thing as it does when it occurs as the main clause of a sentence. And the same puzzles arise for a large family of words called verbs of propositional attitude, including "know", "think", "desire", and "look for".

Section VI discusses one of the most interesting uses of language: *The metaphor*. It is also one of the most difficult problems to analyze because it is at once derivative from the literal use of language and extremely widespread, even in ordinary speech.

Section VII deals with one of the most intriguing and elusive issues in the philosophy of language. *What is the nature of language?* Is it possible for one person to have his own language? Must language be a social phenomenon? Is it a formal system like logic or mathematics? Or a subsystem of the human brain? These issues overlap with the first topic discussed in this book, *meaning*. So, this last topic is a good one on which to end a philosophical reflection on language. Or to begin.

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