

# Philosophy of Language: The Key Thinkers

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# INTRODUCTION

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## 1. Language and philosophy

We live in and through language. To speak less metaphorically, much of the business of our lives is carried out through linguistic means. It is largely with words that we organize our activities and attempt to construct representations and models of the world. It is largely through words that we express ourselves, both to others, and to ourselves – since much if not all of our thinking is conducted with words. Language use is a largely distinctive feature of human life. Although other animals communicate (in the sense of transmitting information) in something like the way we find in language-use, no other animal we know of has a resource with the expressive power and range found in humans' language-using capacities.

Philosophers are interested in language not just because it is so central to human life – though that alone would be good reason to subject it to some philosophical scrutiny. As already hinted, questions of the relationship between language and thought are important. (For instance, some philosophers argue that language is a necessary means for thought, so that without language we would be incapable of the thinking that seems to come so naturally to us.) And there are other motives. At least some philosophers hope that getting clearer about language and its fundamental structures will help them to get clearer about the structure of the world – about metaphysics. So, for instance, philosophers who are interested in the nature of time, and the status of past and future things,

try to get clear about how tense works, and how we might account for the meaning of tensed claims. (Why one might think that the structure of language is a guide to the structure of reality is itself bound up with fundamental issues in the philosophy of language. Some key philosophers of language would question the claim: see the chapters on Carnap and the later Wittgenstein in this volume.) Another more general reason why philosophers are interested in language is that the business of philosophy – argument and conceptual clarification – is conducted using linguistic tools, and philosophers want to subject those tools to careful and critical examination, to try to ensure that they are up to the job, and that more or less subtle traps set by language don't lead us into making mistakes in argument, seeing things the wrong way, or pursuing questions that are in fact senseless (in that they arise from confusions).

## 2. A unified account of language?

When we begin to study language, we meet in the first instance linguistic activity (speech in Japanese, correspondence in French, signing in BSL, and so on). Despite the huge variety found in this activity – we use language to plan, joke, speculate, describe, theorize, soliloquize, question, command, beg, fictionalize, transmit knowledge and information, and to do a great many other things – it is plausible that language-use is in some significant sense a unified phenomenon. And where there are phenomena which are potentially unified, there is an impulse to seek a single theoretical account of them, an account which shows how they are connected and provides, where possible, explanations of what we observe. In physics, for example, atomic theory provides the basis of accounts of the relations between pressure, volume, and temperature in gases, the proportions of materials consumed in chemical compounding, the phenomenon of Brownian motion, and so on. That a theoretical claim helps to provide explanations and predictions across a wide range of phenomena in this way provides us with one reason to think it true. Where such a claim is part of an account which is unbettered, this is *inference to the best explanation*.<sup>1</sup>

It would be good, then, to have a unified and systematic account of central aspects of language-use, an account which showed what the great variety of our linguistic activities have in common, and explained,

where possible, what we observe. But what key concept or concepts might be at the centre of such a unified and systematic account? There is one very obvious and tempting answer here: *meaning*. The phenomena of language use are unified, it seems, in that they exploit the meaningfulness of linguistic expressions. Now, of course, even if this proposal is correct, there is still a very long way to go. Having selected meaning as our key concept, we immediately face some very difficult questions concerning meaning and related issues, including:

- 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 ('grasp its meaning'), or know a language?
- How is linguistic communication possible?
- How can it be that words have publicly accessible meanings?

Before we pursue such questions, however, we should pause and note two important cautionary points.

First, it may be that the phenomena of language-use are *not*, in fact, unified in a way amenable to a grand systematic theory, but are better viewed as arising in a range of activities loosely bonded by various relations of similarity. Such a view might not seem very plausible, once one is gripped by the appeal of the idea that meaning is the 'essence of language', but it's arguable that the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations* held something like this radical 'no system' view (see the chapter on Wittgenstein and the *Investigations* below). In any case there is reason to maintain a certain critical distance from the notion of meaning. This brings us to our second point.

The term 'meaning' is drawn from what we might call 'talk about talk'. In our everyday activities, we make claims of various sorts which are 'about language', and about linguistic activities – for example, 'jongen' in Dutch *means* boy, Galileo *said that* the earth moves, Tom *understood* what David said, Ben *speaks* French, 'Everest' *names* a mountain in the Nepal–China border region. Focusing more closely on 'means' and related expressions, we say such things as: 'La neige est blanche' in French *means the same as* 'Snow is white' in English; when David said 'Coffee will keep me awake' *he meant* he'd decided not to have coffee. It is not obvious that the concept or concepts which are active in these

sorts of everyday claims are suited to a role in a systematic and general theory. On the one hand, it may be that even if a concept, *meaning*, figures in a general and systematic account of language-use, it will need to be a revised and sharpened relative of the everyday concept/s (here we might draw an analogy with the way in which the concepts of theoretical physics, such as force or mass, are revised/sharpened relatives of everyday concepts). On the other hand, and more radically, it may be that, though language-use *is* amenable to treatment in an overarching and systematic theoretical framework, the final theory will be one in which a notion of meaning plays *no significant role*. (Of the key figures studied in this volume, Quine argues for a general account of language-use which has no special place for a notion of meaning, and Chomsky holds that the features of language which are distinctive and pervasive, and amenable to systematic theoretical treatment, are primarily syntactic and grammatical – though his views on meaning are more nuanced.)

Now we are in a position to note a number of reasons why language deserves distinctively philosophical attention – why philosophers should mount a philosophical investigation of language, rather than simply waiting on linguistic science to return its results. First, as we have just noted, it seems likely that the key concepts to be deployed in a systematic account of language-use will be drawn from, or be descendants of, concepts in our everyday talk-about-talk. As such, care will be needed to clarify the content of those everyday concepts and to keep a watchful eye on perhaps otherwise unannounced and therefore potentially misleading revision, refinement or even conflation of those concepts. Secondly, as can be noted by looking back to the questions which arise if we pursue a general theory based on meaning, the kinds of questions which arise are *constitutive* questions ('What is it' questions) and questions of possibility: *What is it* for words to have meaning? *How* do words mean what they do? *How can it be* that words have publicly accessible meanings? *How* is linguistic communication *possible*? Such questions are, if not philosophy's exclusive preserve, at least ones which invite close philosophical attention. Thirdly, there are significant connections between the deepest questions about language-use and philosophical issues in other areas: connections with the philosophy of mind (e.g. with regard to beliefs and the way we report them; with regard to whether language is merely a means for expressing thoughts had independently of language, or something which enables us to have thoughts;

and with regard to what it is to think about, say, a particular thing in the world), and at least potentially there are connections with metaphysics (e.g. with regard to the natures of types of entity we might consider positing in order to account for the meaning of expressions), and epistemology (e.g. with regard to how we might have knowledge of or access to the entities that some particular theories say are bound up with meaning).

Let's summarize what we've seen so far. Language-use is a pervasive and distinctive feature of human life. Language-use is of philosophical interest. It would be very good, from a theorist's point of view, to have a general and systematic theoretical account of language-use, though we should be prepared for the possibilities (a) that careful investigation of language will provide no unified 'deep' theory, and (b) that even if a general theory is forthcoming, it may look quite different from what we might expect, in terms of the precise nature of its key concepts or – more radically – in terms of its general nature.

Now, let's look further at how far we might get by following through on the idea that it is *meaning* which provides the key to a systematic account of language-use.

### 3. Two simple accounts of meaning

It's plausible that an account of language-use which makes a concept of meaning central cannot simply stop at that: we need some account of the nature of meaning, and how words mean what that they do. (We've already raised difficult-sounding questions about meaning, and meanings would seem to be an odd kind of thing. Compare the case of genetics. A geneticist can account for the transmission of characteristics from ancestor to descendant, but seems to owe us an account of what genes are, otherwise the explanation seems incomplete, and genes 'spooky' – that is, not properly related to the overall picture of the world which science reveals. The debt begins to be paid off when genes are related to DNA, and the mechanism of transmission begins to be explained. Now, it may be that meanings are not going to be explained in physical or biological terms, but the theorist who talks about language in terms of meaning will need to say something more about the nature of meaning, at least relating the content of the concept of meaning to



other concepts.) In this section we'll look at two simple outline proposals concerning the nature of meaning.

The first simple proposal aims to exploit connections between language and thought. In uttering a sentence I can express a thought, and in hearing and understanding my utterance you can come to entertain the thought too (and see it as the thought that I have expressed). Without considerable further work, this proposal too simply raises further questions. What are thoughts? (They would seem to be odd sorts of things. They do not seem to be found in public space. It is tempting to think of them as inner psychological occurrences, but this is problematic, as we'll see.) And how is it that a sentence – a mere string of sounds/marks/patterns of illumination/gestures – can express a thought? Further, if what it is for a sentence to have a meaning is for a speaker to associate a thought with it, then how can another identify which thought a speaker associates with a particular sentence? And how is communication to be possible? (This last question seems particularly problematic if thoughts are inner psychological occurrences.)

The second proposal can be seen as trying to address, or perhaps sidestep, these sorts of difficulties. This proposal focuses instead on relations between words and things – things present in public space. Ordinary speakers don't usually have theories about what meaning is, in advance of studying philosophy or linguistics, but many ordinary speakers would endorse both the view that many proper nouns *stand for* or *refer to* particular things, and the view that these relations are very important to these words meaning what they do. Accounts of this second kind try to develop and expand this thought to provide a general account of meaning. And accounts of this type have proved popular, holding a prominent position in philosophical reflection on language for more than one hundred years. The proposal seems promising, in that both words and things are present in public space – at least, many things for which we have words are present there. Again, however, difficult questions arise when we try to develop the basic suggestion. How might we develop what looks like a reasonable proposal for proper nouns so that it applies to other kinds of expression? (It might seem very plausible that 'Barack Obama' stands for the man Barack Obama, but what does 'red' stand for, or 'and', or 'because'?) Further, what is it for a word to *stand for* a thing? What makes it the case that a word stands for a thing? And how are we to accommodate what seem to be the

connections between language and thought – between the linguistic activities of speakers and their mental lives?

A further, broader and deeper difficulty can be raised at this stage – one which faces both thing theories and at least a great many thought theories. We'll raise it first with regard to thing theories. Suppose for the sake of argument that we have managed to assign things to words. The difficulty arises when we note (i) that when we use language we typically use whole sentences, and (ii) that how a sentence is made up from its component words has an impact on what it means. For example, 'Reg loves Amy' and 'Amy loves Reg' are made up from the same words, but mean different things (and, tragically, one can be true when the other is false). The problem is that simply by associating things with words we will not have provided the means to deal with the dependence of sentence meaning on sentence structure. If our account relates words to things one by one, then for all our account says, a sentence is just a list.

Dealing with the way in which, as it seems, word meanings and sentence structure together determine sentence meanings – which we can call *the problem of the unity of the proposition* – is not a negotiable component of a theory of meaning. It is very plausible that this feature of language accounts for the enormous expressive power of languages, and the abilities of speakers with finite powers to use and understand sentences they have not encountered previously – what we can call the *productivity* of language.

An analogous problem afflicts at least many thought theories: to deal with the problem of explaining how sentences are related to thoughts, we might posit connections between words and thought-elements. Again, without further work, it is far from clear how such an approach could count a sentence as any more than a list of such elements.

Note that the problems raised for simple thought and thing theories here are not presented as fatal to all thought- or thing-based accounts; rather, what is important to note is that these difficulties have to be faced. *Simple* thought or thing theories are unlikely to prove satisfactory, but more developed and sophisticated theories might deal with the problems. Indeed, it would be a sorry prospect if connections to thought or the world were barred, because it would seem that any viable theory must make connections of some kinds between language, thought, and the world.

In these first three sections I have sought both to indicate why we should be interested in an investigation into the nature of language, and to outline the large-scale questions and puzzles that arise when we begin such an inquiry. In the sections that follow, I sketch some of the main ideas put forward by the key thinkers discussed in individual chapters, in order to begin to relate them to one another, and show how they bear on the big questions. In the next section, I sketch truth-based accounts of meaning. In section 5, I note some virtues of truth-based accounts, some problems that they face, and various responses to these problems offered by Frege, by Russell and by Wittgenstein (in his early work). In section 6, I consider Logical Empiricist views (including the views of Carnap), and Quine's critical response to them. In section 7, I look at various challenges to what I will call the 'mainstream' view which holds that a systematic account of language use can be given in terms of meaning, with meaning elucidated in terms of truth and reference.<sup>2</sup> Here I consider challenges raised against the mainstream view by Wittgenstein (in his later work), Quine, Austin, Chomsky and Derrida.<sup>3</sup> (The ideas and arguments discussed in Bryan Frances's chapter on Kripke are highlighted in section 5 – in relation to Frege – and in section 7 – in relation to the later Wittgenstein.<sup>4</sup>) In section 8, I sketch some ideas due to Grice which are important in their own right, and which may help defend the mainstream view against some of the challenges. In sections 9 and 10, I turn to two major figures who have sought to clarify the nature of meaning by investigating how to construct systematic meaning theories for individual languages: Donald Davidson, who advocated a truth-based approach; and Michael Dummett, who raises significant further difficulties for truth-based accounts and presses for an alternative approach. I close with some brief summary remarks. Further detailed discussion of the issues raised in this introduction can be found in the excellent individual figure chapters which follow.

#### **4. Truth-based accounts of meaning**

A solution to the problem of the unity of the proposition is implicit in Frege's work. Frege's primary concern was not with everyday language; rather he wanted to show that arithmetic was a part of logic. In order to

do this he needed to show how arithmetical claims could be derived from a small number of claims by purely logical means. (Along the way, Frege pretty much invented modern logic, and formulated powerful accounts of sentences and inferences which had previously resisted systematic treatment. See Mike Beaney's excellent account of Frege's work below.) Since Frege's concern was with logical entailment relations between sentences, he naturally focused upon the truth-relevant properties of sentences, and in turn on how individual expressions contributed to determining truth-involving properties of sentences.<sup>5</sup> This strategy promises a solution to the problem of unity: whereas it is difficult to see how assigning things or thought-elements to words can result in anything but sentences being viewed as lists, it is relatively easy to assign truth-relevant properties to expressions in a way which allows for the role of structure in determining the truth-relevant properties of sentences.<sup>6</sup>

In Frege's version of this general kind of theory, basic expressions are seen as being associated with an extra-linguistic entity, in virtue of which association they contribute to determining the truth-value of the sentences in which they appear: this is the expression's *reference*; and the item to which an expression refers is called its *referent*.<sup>7</sup> (Frege, then, can be seen as framing his account in terms of a refined and specific version of *standing for*.) On Frege's account, some complex expressions have reference, with the reference of specific complex expressions being determined by the references of their parts, and the way they're put together. This includes sentences, with true sentences referring to an object, the truth-value True, and false sentences referring to another object, the truth-value False. (This seems odd at first consideration, but sits quite naturally with seeing complex expressions as having reference, and with the fact that sentences can figure as parts of larger sentences.)

The promising aspects of truth-based accounts of word meaning are more easily illustrated in the kind of truth theory deployed by Davidson in his account of meaning and interpretation (see the chapter on Davidson for further details). In Davidsonian truth theories, expressions are assigned properties which contribute to determining the truth-conditions of the sentences in which they appear (and there is no insistence on having a notion of reference which is applicable to complex expressions). For example, we might have

- (R1) 'Barack' (noun phrase) refers to Barack
- (S1) 'smokes' (verb phrase) is satisfied by a thing if and only if that thing smokes
- (C1) A sentence made up from a noun phrase followed by a verb phrase is true if and only if the thing to which the noun phrase refers satisfies the verb phrase

These together determine the following:

'Barack smokes' is true iff Barack smokes

Theories of this general kind are so promising because they show how an important semantic property (meaning property) of sentences can be determined by assignments of semantic properties to their component expressions. We'll see why this is good shortly.

It's worth making a brief aside here. Those new to the philosophy of language are often surprised at the amount of time spent discussing what seem to be quite specific proposals concerning the semantics of particular kinds of expressions (e.g. proper names). What is, I hope, beginning to be apparent is that broad proposals about the nature of meaning need to be tested in the details of language, and we can only give a proper evaluation of such views by providing an account which plausibly extends to the whole of language: we do (general) theory of meaning only by trying to construct a systematic theory of meaning – a theory which accounts systematically for the meaning of all of the sentences in the language. We'll return to these issues below.

## 5. Some benefits and costs of truth-based accounts

Truth-based accounts of meaning chime very well with our intuitions that language can be and is used to transmit information and pass on knowledge: typically, when a speaker utters a declarative sentence, she presents it as true; and a hearer who knows the truth conditions of the sentence will see her as presenting herself as holding that the condition obtains.

The sorts of accounts we've sketched also seem to have another important virtue. They show how it can be possible for us to understand novel sentences – sentences we have not heard before; and they show how it can be possible for language to be learnable by finite creatures with finite capacities.

Accounts based on truth and reference do, however, face some significant problems.

First, there is a difficulty with 'empty' terms: expressions which lack reference. According to a theory of the simple type we've sketched, the meaningfulness of a name consists in its referring to a particular thing: 'Barack' refers to Barack. This adverts to a relation between an expression and a thing, and for this kind of expression, it's standing in that relation to a thing which is what makes it meaningful. But now, what about expressions which seem to be in this category, and seem to be meaningful (they are used in what seem to be meaningful ways), but which lack reference? What about 'Santa', 'Sherlock Holmes' and 'Vulcan'?<sup>8</sup> Our account says that 'Barack' refers to Barack, but there is no true statement (of the relevant form) beginning "'Santa" refers to . . . '.

Secondly, there seem to be aspects of meaning which cannot be accounted for in terms of reference. The key semantic property of our theory is reference. The reference of an expression is just a matter of its relation to a particular object. The movie actor Cary Grant was born Archibald Leach. So 'Cary Grant' and 'Archibald Leach' are exactly alike in reference. But it seems that anyone who understood 'Cary Grant is Cary Grant' (grasped its meaning) would recognize it as true on that basis, whereas it seems that someone might *understand* 'Cary Grant is Archibald Leach' and yet not recognize its truth – suppose they knew Archie as a child, and learn the name 'Cary Grant' watching movies. ('Cary is Archibald' might come as *news* to someone who understood it, hence the usual name for this puzzle: *the problem of informative identities*.) The key point here is that our attributions of reference – the only attributions of semantic properties to expressions we've made (to names) so far – seem inadequate to accounting for what seems to be a difference of meaning here.

There are other challenges too – particular variations on challenges which face any attempt to provide an account of meaning. In virtue of what does an expression refer? (What is it for a word to have meaning?) And what is it for a speaker to grasp the reference of an expression?

(What is required for a speaker to understand – to be semantically competent with – an expression?)

Responses to these problems and challenges have been various.

Frege introduced an additional semantic property into his account: *sense*. The sense of an expression involves a *mode of presentation* or *mode of determination* – intuitively and roughly, a way in which the referent is presented (to the speaker), or a way of ‘picking out’ a referent. The sense of an expression is then the mode of presentation (or mode of determination) *obligatorily associated with the expression* – the mode of presentation (or determination) which a speaker *must* associate with the expression to qualify as understanding it.<sup>9</sup> How we might fill out what Frege says about sense into a fully explicit and satisfying account is a contested issue, but one kind of account starts with the idea that a mode of presentation is a way in which the *referent* is presented to (the mind of) the speaker.

Introducing senses promises to deal with our problems and challenges in the following ways. The names ‘Cary Grant’ and ‘Archibald Leach’ can be seen as possessing different senses: the modes of presentation involved are modes of presentation of the same object, but this need not be apparent to a speaker who grasps both. And it may be (though this is controversial) that there can be sense without reference (without a referent), allowing for the possibility of meaningful but empty names. And, further, we can say that to understand an expression (and have a grasp of its reference sufficient for understanding) is to grasp its sense, and that expressions are meaningful in virtue of having sense assigned to them.

Theories which talk about senses face their own difficulties, however. As noted already, the precise nature of sense is contested. If senses are to be aspects of public, shared meanings, then senses will have to be sharable. Frege carefully distinguished senses from what he called *ideas* (private mental items such as mental images). We can perhaps see how a mode of presentation can be public property if it is something like a *perspective* on an object – for example, the familiar prospect of the White House onto its frontage, which can be enjoyed by anyone suitably placed. If there are to be senses without referents, senses threaten to be yet more rarefied. If they are abstract objects, however (rather than *abstractions* from our mind-involving dealings with the world), then this raises difficulties – about how we have knowledge of them,

how they are associated with words, and how we come to know how others associate them with words.<sup>10</sup>

We can note as an aside that the case for sense faces further challenges. For one thing, our observations concerning informative identities might be explained without having modes of presentation figure as aspects of objective meaning. It might be, for instance, that all there is to the public meaning of an ordinary proper name is its reference, with modes of presentation only being involved in individual speakers picking out the referent, so that different speakers might associate different modes of presentation with the same name (quite legitimately, and without any doubts being raised about their semantic competence with the name).<sup>11</sup> It is true that the advocate of Fregean sense can field a further argument for sense, relating to occurrences of co-referring names in the context of propositional attitude reports – including reports of beliefs, like ‘George believes that Cary Grant is a film star’, ‘George does not believe that Archibald Leach is a film star’ (see section 9 of the chapter on Frege). It may be that this argument provides stronger support than is provided by the puzzle of informative identities, as in these cases the truth-conditions of the sentences seem to be involved, but a forceful objection has been raised against this argument by Saul Kripke (see the chapter on Kripke, sections 1–3, for detailed discussion).

Frege classed definite descriptions (phrases such as ‘the mother of Barack Obama’) as referring expressions. He saw the reference of complex expression as determined by the references of their parts: the reference of ‘the mother of Barack Obama’ being determined by the reference of ‘Barack Obama’ and the function associated with ‘the mother of’, which takes us from Barack to Ann Dunham. This is problematic when it comes to empty descriptions, such as ‘the greatest prime number’. There seem to be meaningful sentences (possessing truth-values) which contain empty descriptions, but how are we to see a reference being determined for such a sentence if one of its significant parts lacks reference altogether?<sup>12</sup>

Russell proposed that definite descriptions be dealt with differently. He suggested that they are not referring expressions, but rather devices of quantification: instead of making a claim directly about a particular object (like ‘Everest is a mountain’, which says of a particular thing – Everest – that it has a particular characteristic – being a mountain), a



sentence involving a definite description makes a quantificational ('how many') claim, about the numbers of things having particular characteristics. For example 'the man skiing down Everest is French' is true, according to Russell's view, if and only if it is the case that there is *exactly one* man skiing down Everest, and that *all* men skiing down Everest are French. This gets round the problem of empty descriptions: definite description phrases just do a very different job from referring expressions; they don't have to have a reference determined for them in order for them to be meaningful; and intuitively, it's clear how we can understand descriptions on the basis of understanding the predicates which feature in them (characterizing expressions like '(is a) man', 'is skiing down Everest', and so on), together with quantifying expressions like 'there is exactly one', without any need to pick out a particular object as being related to the description.

Russell's theory of descriptions deals nicely with the problem of empty descriptions. It can also deal with the problem of informative identities involving two definite descriptions (such as 'The inventor of ball-wheeled wheelbarrows is the inventor of cyclonic vacuum cleaners'). But it does not deal in any obvious way with the analogous difficulties for proper names. If we want to avoid having to say that proper names have senses, a different solution must be sought. Russell suggested that proper names in everyday language (natural language) were in fact disguised definite descriptions.<sup>13</sup> (Very much later, however, Saul Kripke showed that there were severe difficulties to be faced in trying to account for the meaning of proper names by seeing them as disguised definite descriptions.<sup>14</sup>)

Accounting for the meaning of apparently simple expressions in terms of definite descriptions cannot go on forever. It seems that the process must stop somewhere, with expressions which are attributed fundamental semantic properties. This brings us back to fundamental issues. What are the fundamental properties? How is it that expressions have these properties? What is it for a speaker to grasp these properties?

For Russell, at the fundamental level there were 'logically proper names'. These really did function by referring. To understand such a name, one had to be *acquainted* with its referent, in a special sense: one had to be in direct cognitive contact with the referent. Since the meaningfulness of such a name consisted in its referring, the meaningfulness of such names demands the existence of their referents.

In his earlier work, Wittgenstein held views with significant points of similarity to those of Russell. (See the chapter on Wittgenstein and the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* below.) He held that at a fundamental level linguistic meaning must be a matter of expressions standing in the (genuine) naming relation to elements of reality, with arrangements of these names *picturing* the facts they represented.

The views of Russell and Wittgenstein here seem problematic. Acquaintance is very demanding, and it is far from clear that we stand in any such relation to anything. Russell's suggestion, that what we are acquainted with are 'sense data' – basic items of sensory experience – makes serious difficulties for the publicity of meaning: if the meaning of my words is grounded in connections with *my* sense data, it's difficult to see how you can know what my words mean. Wittgenstein's view in the *Tractatus* comes at a heavy metaphysical cost – it requires the existence of indestructible simples – and its view of the basis of meaning in projection (a mental act of correlating a name with a simple) seems obscure; and there are other points at which significant objections may be raised against the account.

We have been looking at attempts to account for linguistic meaning in terms of truth and reference. We have noted some of the pressures which come to bear on such accounts, including the difficulties in spelling out the notion of sense faced by Fregean accounts, and the various metaphysical and epistemological worries which arise with regard to the views of Russell and Wittgenstein. We'll turn now to the next major trend in the development of theories of meaning: Logical Empiricism. Logical empiricist views can be seen as offering potential solutions to at least some of the difficulties encountered so far.

## 6. Logical empiricism and Quinean holism

The Vienna Circle was a group of philosophers and scientists who met regularly to discuss philosophical issues between 1924 and 1936. Key figures in the group included Moritz Schlick, Otto Neurath and Rudolph Carnap. The broad outlook of the group was empiricist and anti-metaphysical: they held that knowledge was grounded in experience of the world, and were suspicious of claims about realms allegedly beyond such experience. They held that natural science was a model for genu-

ine knowledge. And they proposed a criterion of meaningfulness: roughly, that for a sentence to be meaningful is for there to be ways of supporting or undermining its claim to truth based in experience. The outline criterion was filled out in various different ways, at the extreme in the *principle of verification*, captured in the claim that to understand a sentence is to know its method of verification/falsification (to know how it might be demonstrated to be true or false on the basis of experience).

The approach of the Vienna Circle was reformist, rather than descriptive: they were open to the idea that some linguistic practices might be modified, or even abandoned as not properly meaningful. This outlook opened up the possibility that in some cases where it proved difficult to give accounts of meaning, the problems could be shrugged off as due to defects in language and its practice, rather than shortcomings in the theoretical approach applied.

One aim of Vienna Circle thinkers was to frame a language suitable for empirical science. In very rough outline, the typical strategy was to frame accounts of the vocabulary figuring in observational sentences in such a way that the meaning of those sentences was accounted for in terms of the observations which would confirm or infirm (verify or falsify) each sentence. The significance of more theoretical sentences was then to be accounted for by seeing them as (equivalent to) logical constructions of observation sentences. This sort of view has quite a lot of intuitive appeal at first glance: we learn to use words like 'cat' in situations in which the word is associated with characteristic experiences, and it seems that the idea might generalize.

The Logical Empiricist programme faces problems in two key areas: logic and mathematics. Logical knowledge does not seem to be empirical, so what is its status? A typical response was the sentences expressing the principles of logic are *analytic*, in the sense of being determined as true simply in virtue of the meanings of their component expressions together with their structure – the way those expressions are put together.

Mathematics was another matter. Mathematics seems to be required for modern science, but mathematics seems to talk about strange objects, namely numbers. (When we say 'There is a prime number between 12 and 16' we seem to speak truly, and the truth of this claim seems to require that there exists some thing which is a number and

prime.) What are these objects? And how do we have knowledge of them? We don't seem to encounter them in the world available to experience. We might be tempted to say that they exist in a special realm, and that we intuit their properties by a special faculty, but this would seem to be highly dubious by empiricist standards. One response to this difficulty is to try to show that the truths of mathematics follow from truths of logic. This is logicism. Frege attempted to push through the logicist programme (with somewhat different motivations), but his attempt had been shown to fail by Russell, who pointed out that a key principle used by Frege generated a contradiction, and so could not be true. A significant part of the Logical Empiricist project is taken up with trying to resolve these difficulties concerning mathematics.

Logical Empiricism faces key objections in more easily graspable regards. First, the criterion of meaningfulness is difficult to articulate in a precise and satisfying way. And further, it seems self-undermining: What might confirm/infirm *it*? And if it's not open to *empirical* evaluation, on what basis might it be held to be analytic?<sup>15</sup> Secondly, the picture of meaning presented by Logical Empiricism can be seen as dubious. To what do the basic observational sentences relate – sense experience, or objective matters? If the former, we face the sorts of difficulties noted above relating to the views of Russell and Wittgenstein. If the latter, then other problems arise, problems noted by Quine. The key point here is that it is dubious that any 'observational' sentence can be conclusively established as true or false on the basis of observations alone. For example, an experience as of a pink swan does not verify 'There is a pink swan'; such an experience might be discounted on the basis of a belief that lighting conditions were deceptive. Thirdly, appeals to analyticity can appear dubious from an empiricist perspective. Notoriously, Quine argued that attempts to explain analyticity were unsatisfying, and that sharp and determinate attributions of meaning to linguistic expressions were not supportable by empirical investigation of language-use. In Quine's naturalistic view of language, our linguistic activities are expressions of complex dispositions, and 'our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually but only as a corporate body' (Quine, 1961 [1951], p. 41); indeed, as Quine holds that an (epistemologically significant) analytic/synthetic distinction cannot be maintained, our evaluations of logical and mathematical claims are open to revision in the light of

experience – though very serious and specific pressures would be required to force changes at such levels.

It's worth noting here that Carnap's views don't obviously fit the rather simple caricature of Vienna Circle orthodoxy sketched above: he held that we could specify a wide range of languages, each with their own rules, and choose between them on the basis of various considerations. This makes the question of whether Quine's criticisms apply to his views a difficult one (see the chapters on Carnap and Quine).

## **7. Challenges to the mainstream: Wittgenstein and the *Philosophical Investigations*, Quine (again), Austin, Chomsky and Derrida**

The attempts to provide a satisfying theoretical account of language that we have looked at so far have some broad features in common. They attempt to provide an account of meaning which is systematic, in the sense that sentence meanings are to be accounted for on the basis of attributions of abiding semantic properties to their component words. And they give a key role to the notions of reference and truth in attempts to specify these abiding properties. These common features have been subjected to criticism on a variety of counts.

In his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein presents a number of criticisms of attempts at systematic accounts of meaning. Some of these are primarily applicable to views similar to Russell's and those he himself expressed in the *Tractatus* – for instance where he attacks the idea that proper names in natural language should be analysed in terms of complex expressions – but others cut much deeper and have potentially much wider application. Amongst other things, Wittgenstein emphasizes the vast range of activities in which language figures, going far beyond the giving of descriptions of how things stand; he presses the idea that one and the same sentence may be used to do very different things on different occasions (e.g. at PI 79, where he lists a number of things that might be meant by saying 'Moses did not exist'); and he questions the extent to which an account of language use in terms of associations between expressions and meanings can be genuinely explanatory. He suggests that the use of language is woven into

non-linguistic activities in many ways – so that it may be that there is no underlying ‘essence’ of linguistic activity to be captured by an overarching theory – with the various complexes of linguistic and non-linguistic activity counting as language in virtue of a network of overlapping dimensions of similarity (‘family resemblance’). Crucially, he subjects the idea that (some kind of *grasp* of) meaning *guides* use to severe critical scrutiny in his consideration of ‘following a rule’ (see the chapter on Wittgenstein and the *Investigations*, and the chapter on Kripke, which contains an interesting discussion of Kripke’s important and much-discussed reading of Wittgenstein’s remarks in this area). The extent to which Wittgenstein’s arguments support what seem to be his radically anti-systematic conclusions is a matter for careful investigation. Some attempts at systematic accounts of language-use and meaning coming after Wittgenstein can be seen as paying careful attention to the *use* of language by creatures engaged in activities in a shared world, in ways which might provide responses to at least some of the worries he raises (see the chapter on Davidson – especially the discussion of ‘radical interpretation’ – and the chapter on Grice). It is clear, however, that the concerns voiced by Wittgenstein in his later work cannot simply be disregarded.

Quine can also be seen as a severe critic of what I’ve characterized as ‘the mainstream’. He suggested that we investigate to what degree assignments of meaning to expressions might be supported by empirical data about the use of a novel language plausibly available prior to translation of that language – so-called *radical translation*. He argued that, at the very least, the results would be insufficient to make out anything like our pre-theoretical notion of meaning as scientifically respectable. He also argued that, contrary to initial appearances, establishing unique assignments of reference to expressions was not a basic task to be completed in giving an account of our linguistic capacities. (See the chapters on Quine and Davidson.<sup>16</sup>)

Compared to the grand sweep of the views of Quine and the later Wittgenstein, J. L. Austin’s work in the philosophy of language can seem quite modest. He laid out a careful account of linguistic acts, on which one and the same utterance could be seen as the execution of various different kinds of action. He also made some interesting and provoking observations on the evaluation of utterances with regard to truth. Austin’s work on linguistic acts is significant, and his distinctions remain

widely accepted. His work on truth has until recently been largely disregarded. As Guy Longworth argues in his chapter on Austin, this may be a significant oversight, as it may well pose a serious problem for truth-conditional accounts of meaning.

In terms of linguistic acts, Austin distinguished between: *locutionary acts* (roughly, acts of uttering a sentence with a particular meaning, for example, uttering the words 'Barry would like some cake' with the content *Barry would like some cake*); *illocutionary acts* (roughly, acts of making an utterance with a particular content and a particular *force*, for example, uttering 'Barry would like some cake' with the force of a request, as when ordering in a café); and *perlocutionary acts* (acts consequential on locutionary and illocutionary acts, such as incidentally reminding a hearer of the deliciousness of cake, causing them to want some). His account of linguistic acts raises one significant challenge for advocates of truth-based accounts of meaning. Some illocutionary acts are evaluable in ways which are not directly connected with truth: for example, if I say 'I promise to give you £10 tomorrow' to someone in the right sort of context, I incur an obligation to give them £10 the following day. Here the truth of the utterance does not seem to be an issue.

There does seem to be a question here for the advocate of truth-based theories, but it may not be fatal: the sentence just mentioned does have truth conditions, and it seems open to the theorist to tell a story as to how these figure in its use. More difficult are the considerations Austin raised concerning the evaluation of utterances in terms of truth.

In outline, Austin presented examples in which one and the same sentence could be used on one occasion to make a statement (an illocutionary act) which would be rightly judged true, and on another occasion to make a statement rightly judged false, in such a way that it seems implausible that there should be a constant truth-condition associated with the sentence as (the basis of) its meaning. Now, there are cases in which there are variations of this kind which are attributable to constant aspects of sentence meaning which relate to context. A statement utterance of 'I am hungry' by a particular speaker at a particular time is true if that speaker is hungry at that time, so that variations in the truth evaluation of particular utterances of the sentence are traceable to elements making a constant contribution to determining truth-conditions

in context. Similarly, a statement utterance of 'Barry is tall' made in the philosophy department may be true, whereas one made at a basketball game may be false, and this attributed to a tacit specification of a relevant comparison group. These sorts of ideas probably led to this aspect of Austin's work being largely overlooked for a considerable time, but it may be that some at least of his examples cannot be dismissed so easily – in these it is arguable that hidden references to contextual factors cannot accommodate the variations in truth evaluation in a way compatible with word-meaning being accounted for in terms of constant contributions to truth-conditions. This case is pressed in the chapter on Austin.

Chomsky holds a radical position on what aspects of language are amenable to systematic theoretical treatment. In outline, his view is that the stable linguistic phenomena which can be explained by a unified theory are matters of grammar (generalizations concerning syntactic structures displayed in individuals' linguistic behaviour), rather than mastery of externally specified public languages. Significantly, for our present concerns, he doubts the cogency of mainstream semantics which tries to specify constant-contribution meanings in terms of relations between expressions and particular entities. He presents a number of arguments in favour of this view; for example, in relation to standard reference-specification treatments of names ('Barack' refers to Barack), he points out the apparent inability of this strategy to address our use of empty names, and its limited use in accounting for occurrences of names as mass terms ('After the jet engine accident, there was Simon Cowell all over the runway') or general nouns ('What this team needs is a Beckham').

The final challenge to the 'mainstream' I want to note here comes from outside the philosophical tradition within which all of the other key figures considered in this volume can be seen as having worked (however uncomfortably, at times, in the case of the later Wittgenstein). The writings of Jacques Derrida are apt to seem difficult (and difficult in unfamiliar ways) to philosophers in that 'analytic', largely Anglophone, tradition. In his chapter, Thomas Baldwin attempts to present Derrida's key ideas on language in ways that will be accessible to analytic philosophers, and subjects those ideas to critical scrutiny. Derrida holds that linguistic meaning arises in the 'play of difference' – 'difference' is Derrida's invented term covering both networks of



*differences* between different expressions (in which, it's suggested, they have significance partly in virtue of these relations of difference), and *deferral* (the dependence of meaning upon *repeated* uses of expressions on different occasions). Derrida sees this view as having significant philosophical consequences – for example, in undermining the '*myth of presence*', according to which meanings are taken to be available to thinkers directly, in turn undermining what he calls 'the philosophy of the West'. Crucially, for our purposes, Derrida suggests that the view determines that no systematic and objective account can be given of the workings of language; because (roughly) any such account would itself depend upon the play of difference. Baldwin criticizes these suggestions (in what is a rich and significant new evaluation of Derrida's work in this area), arguing that the view *cannot* be used to condemn systematic inquiries which do not depend upon the assumption that meanings are 'present'. Examples of inquiries which do not depend on the suspect assumption include Kant's philosophy, and Kripke's investigation of claims concerning existence and essence in his *Naming and Necessity* (Kripke, 1980) – which pays careful attention to the workings of language. Baldwin concludes that Derrida's insights should lead us to look to 'transcendental' investigations into what grounds the *possibility* of meaning, and that Derrida's own *Of Grammatology* (Derrida, 1974) should be seen 'as an enquiry which aims to vindicate the conception of language as "movement of difference" by showing how this explains the possibility of meaningful language' (Baldwin, this volume).

## **8. Grice and the semantics/pragmatics distinction**

Paul Grice is famous within philosophy for two major contributions to thought about language. The first is a contribution to pragmatics (roughly, what speakers can achieve with the use of meaningful sentences through broadly linguistic means). This contribution was his account of conversational implicature and maxims of conversation. The second is a proposal in the theory of meaning: his account of speaker meaning in terms of reflexive intentions. In this introduction I will focus on the first contribution.

Suppose we're at a football match. Our team is losing. You say, 'Should we go?' and I respond with 'I'm very cold'. Intuitively, there's a sense in which I've said 'Yes, we should go', but there's no temptation to suppose that the *sentence* I uttered has that meaning: the proposition (claim) *expressed* by the sentence I used – that I'm very cold – is different to the proposition *conveyed* by my using it – that we should go. It seems that here we can distinguish between *semantics* (in the sense of the systematic determination of sentence meaning by constant word-meanings) and *pragmatics*. Grice highlighted effects of this general sort, and provided an account of how they work. (In outline, the account depends upon the idea that conversation is a cooperative activity, governed by certain tacit guidelines. Speakers can exploit these guidelines: when an utterance seems to breach them, this triggers a search for an explanation of why the speaker said what she did, and this can lead to identification of a conveyed – 'implicated' – proposition.)

Phenomena of this sort are intriguing, but Grice's treatment of them has wider significance. In our football example, the difference between the proposition expressed and the proposition conveyed is marked – no one is likely to suppose that the *sentence* 'I'm so cold' must mean 'Let's go' on this occasion. But there are more subtle cases: cases in which the difference between the proposition expressed (by the sentence) and the proposition conveyed is not so marked, so that we might be tempted into thinking that the sentence, on that occasion at least, has that proposition as its meaning. So we might mistake a merely conveyed proposition for a sentence meaning. This is potentially very important. For instance, one form of argument against attempts to give systematic accounts of language-use in terms of assignments of constant meanings to words depends on citing apparent variations in the meaning of expressions – some of the considerations raised by Wittgenstein, Austin and Chomsky against specifically truth-and-reference-based semantics can be seen in this light. Grice's distinction may provide a defence, if the variations can be understood as variations in what is conveyed, rather than what is expressed in terms of the semantically determined meanings of the sentences used. (It's a very interesting question whether Grice's machinery can form the basis of a satisfactory response to all considerations of this broad sort. See the chapters on Austin and Chomsky and, as a useful and entertaining outline of some of the issues, Sainsbury, 2001.)

## 9. Davidson, truth theories and 'radical interpretation'

The idea that an account of meaning could be framed in terms of truth is implicit in Frege's work, and in much that followed, but the suggestion was developed in an exciting, original and powerfully systematic way by Donald Davidson, starting in the mid 1960s. Davidson's version of the view introduced two main novel elements. First, Davidson applied work on truth in formal languages to the study of natural language and the elucidation of meaning. Secondly, he investigated how a theory of truth might be applied in interpreting the speech of a group speaking an unknown language on the basis of evidence concerning their behaviour – what he termed *radical interpretation*. This second element introduces the possibility that Davidson might solve some of the deepest and most pressing puzzles concerning language-use and meaning. If it could be shown how facts about meaning are determined by facts about behaviour (in a way that could be discerned by observers of that behaviour), then we would have gone a long way towards showing how it is that words mean what they do, what it is for a speaker to mean what they do by the words that they use, and how communication is possible.

In the 1930s, Alfred Tarski had shown how to construct theories of truth for formal languages. Tarski showed how semantic properties could be assigned to basic expressions in such a way that the conditions of application of an expression 'is true (in language L)' to all of sentences of language L were clearly defined. (A sketch of how this kind of theory can begin to deal with simple subject–predicate sentences is given in section 4 above – see the chapter on Davidson for more detail. One of Tarski's great achievements was to show how complex quantified sentences like 'Someone dances and laughs' can be accommodated.) The outputs of Tarski-style theories were 'T-sentences', sentences analogous to: "'Calais est une ville" is true (in French) if and only if Calais is a town.' Tarski's truth definitions relied on a notion of meaning: confidence that it was *truth* that had been defined was secured by requiring that the sentence used to state the condition of the application of the truth predicate is a *translation* of the mentioned sentence in the target language (the 'object language'), in each of the T-sentences.

Davidson turns Tarski's procedure on its head. He assumes that we have a grip on the concept of truth, and then attempts to show how evidence available *before* successful interpretation of a language might be brought to bear on selection of a Tarski-style truth theory for that language, in such a way that the theory would serve to provide interpretations of sentences in that language – that is, assignments of meaning.<sup>17</sup>

Davidson's investigation of radical interpretation followed on from Quine's radical translation – Davidson was deeply influenced by Quine. Both philosophers are concerned with the way in which assignments of meaning might be determined by evidence available prior to successful interpretation; but there are more and less subtle differences between their views, and difficult questions concerning the fundamental characters of their accounts of language. Here I can give only a brief indication of what some of the significant differences and points of comparison might be. First, Quine's preference is for evidence that, so far as is possible, is in line with the outlook of physical science: he talks in terms of patterns of stimulation prompting assent behaviour, for instance. Davidson, on the other hand, is content with evidence concerning speakers *holding true* specific sentences in particular kinds of environmental circumstances, and *holding true* is both a *mental* attitude and one with semantical content. Davidson holds that evidence concerning holding true doesn't just *include* facts about meaning – we can, he hopes, have good reason to believe a particular speaker holds a particular sentence true without already knowing what that sentence means – but in depending upon holding true we have not escaped from the range of psychological and content-involving concepts – *thought, meaning, belief, desire, intention, truth* and so on – concepts which can seem puzzling and mysterious from the perspective of physical science. Secondly, Quine emphasizes both the possibility that a range of intuitively different meaning-assignments might be compatible with his behavioural evidence on all objective measures, and how more or less practical considerations might affect choice of translation theory (thus making selection of one theory over another non-objective); whereas Davidson emphasizes the role of what he claims are a priori principles in constraining determination of truth-theory in radical interpretation.

Davidson did not, it seems, provide a *reductive* account of meaning – he does not give, and did not intend to give, an analysis or explanation of

meaning in terms acceptable to physical science – instead he hoped to use his investigation of radical interpretation to illuminate and clarify the concepts involved – *meaning, truth, belief, desire, intention* – by showing how they are related to one another in a larger structure. Whether he succeeded in giving a genuinely illuminating account of the relations between these concepts is contested (as we have noted already, the idea that meaning can be accounted for in terms of truth faces objections from a number of sources), but Davidson’s project is bold and ingenious, and uncovers a great deal concerning the problems to be faced in providing an account of language and meaning.

## 10. Dummett on theories of meaning

Like Davidson, Dummett aims to provide a satisfying philosophical account of meaning (a theory of meaning) by investigating how we might construct a *meaning theory* for a language – a systematic specification of the meanings of the expressions in the language (including its sentences). Unlike Davidson, Dummett does not think that specifications of truth-conditions can play a central role in such a meaning theory. Dummett’s arguments for this position are subtle and complex, depending on a number of constraints on what can be considered a satisfactory meaning theory. (Bernard Weiss’s detailed discussion of Dummett’s work is perhaps the most challenging in this book.) But we can begin with the following rough sketch. Knowledge of a language consists in knowledge of a meaning theory for that language – speakers must be somehow rationally sensitive to the meanings of their words, otherwise language-use could not be guided by meaning – but this knowledge must be implicit, rather than explicit. (Explicit knowledge is knowledge that possessors can put into words, and ordinary speakers cannot articulate meaning theories for their languages in explicit terms.) We can make sense of *implicit* knowledge in terms of *abilities*: speakers must be able to *manifest* their knowledge of the theory through their abilities. Moreover, since language can be *acquired* by those who do not already possess it, the specification of the theory must not merely presuppose conceptual expertise equivalent to understanding. (So, for example, reference-specifying clauses like “‘Obama’ refers to Obama”,

which might be found in a Davidson-style truth-theory for a language, would not be counted satisfactory by Dummett's standards.) Clear manifestation of grasp of the semantic properties of a sentence assigned by a truth-theoretic account would require recognition of the obtaining of the truth-conditions of the sentence. But the nub of the argument: there are many sentences such that their truth/falsity is not open to recognition (e.g. 'Every even number is the sum of two primes', 'Alexander the Great had a mole in his right armpit', and, perhaps, some what-if claims in which the 'if' is never a reality – say, 'If I had practised really hard for the last ten years, I would be able to sing like Christina Aguilera'). Grasp of the semantic property which is meant to be assigned to such sentences by truth-theoretic accounts is thus not manifestable, and so the property cannot be assigned as the key semantic property in a tenable theory. Dummett's argument constitutes a serious challenge to truth-theoretic approaches. Dummett has proposed an alternative approach to systematic semantics, based in assertability conditions, but this alternative has itself been seen to face serious obstacles.

## 11. Closing remarks

The figures whose work is examined in this book raise high-level questions about language. To what extent, if at all, is language-use amenable to treatment in terms of detailed and systematic theory? If it is amenable, should the theory make use of a concept of meaning? And if it should make use of such a concept, what account can be given of it, and what other concepts should figure centrally in its analysis or elucidation? (Truth? Reference? Sense? Or other concepts?) The views of the figures considered take up various positions on these questions, and on questions of the relations between language, mind, and the world – questions, for example, concerning how things must stand with a speaker's individual psychology when they understand a linguistic expression of a particular kind, or how any semantic relations between words and objects are set up and maintained.<sup>18</sup> In this introduction I have sought to give an overview of the debates concerning these questions, and how the views of the key figures who are the subjects of the individual chapters that follow bear upon them. I hope I have

conveyed some sense of both the intellectual excitement of philosophy of language – in which difficult questions relating to epistemology, metaphysics and the philosophy of mind converge – and the degree to which – now, more than one hundred and twenty years after Frege began to lay out materials and tools with which we might attempt to construct a systematic account of language use – the deep and central questions remain open and fiercely contested.

A note on the nature of this book, and how to use it: The chapters which follow are not ‘arm’s length’, general surveys of the views of the figures they consider. Chapter authors have selected what they see as the most important ideas and arguments put forward by the philosophers they discuss, and have engaged with these critically. The chapters do not attempt to be complete surveys of thinkers’ views, or entirely non-partisan in their approach. Chapter authors have advocated particular interpretations and evaluations of the work of their subjects, themselves taking up positions in ongoing debates.<sup>19</sup> The focus and partiality of the chapters will, I hope, help to bring you into close and critical engagement with the views presented. The nature of the book means that you should view it as an entry-point to the debates it introduces. To arrive at a considered view of the issues, you will need to read, and think, further – exploring primary texts, following up on suggestions for further secondary reading, and reflecting carefully on the arguments.

### Further Reading

Good general introductions to the philosophy of language include: Miller, 2007; Morris, 2007; and Taylor, 1998. An interesting introduction to some central issues through selections from important primary sources together with carefully constructed commentaries and reading notes is given by *Reading Philosophy of Language*, ed. Jennifer Hornsby and Guy Longworth (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005). More traditional collections of classic papers include the generously proportioned *Readings in the Philosophy of Language*, ed. Peter Ludlow (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997) and the somewhat more handily sized *Arguing about Language*, ed. Darragh Byrne and Max Kölbel (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010). Two very useful collections containing ‘state of the art’ overview essays on particular aspects of the philosophy of language are *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language*, ed. Bob Hale and Crispin Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) and *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Language*, ed. Ernest Lepore and

Barry C. Smith (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006). Two very interesting books which explore the relations between language, mind and world primarily through investigations into proper names and related expressions are McCulloch, 1989, and Sainsbury, 2005 (chapters 1 and 2 of Sainsbury's book give a concise and elegant introduction to the issues). For advice on additional reading on the individual key figures mentioned in this introduction, see the further reading recommendations and bibliographies attached to the relevant chapters.

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## Notes

- 1 The drive for unified accounts or theories is not restricted to 'hard' science: an account of Shakespeare's plays which found in them a substantive and distinctive view of human nature and the human condition would deserve our attention and, if it fitted the texts and was not outdone by an alternative view, earn a degree of credence.
- 2 The division of views and figures into 'mainstream' and critical or 'anti-mainstream' camps is rough and ready, and largely intended as a presentational and organizational device. It provides an initial way of placing views, and should be refined in further study.
- 3 The order in which figures are discussed in this introduction does not perfectly replicate the historical order in which those figures began to make their key contributions, for thematic and presentational reasons. The greatest distortion, perhaps, in terms of simple chronology is in placing discussion of Derrida before discussion of Grice and Davidson.
- 4 Introductions to Kripke's work with regard to the philosophy of language typically emphasize his views on naming and necessity. In this volume the concentration is on his views on arguments for Fregean sense, the role of intuitions in philosophy of language, and his interpretation/development of Wittgenstein's remarks on following a rule.



- 5 A set of sentences  $\{S_1, S_2, \dots, S_j\}$  entails a sentence  $S_n$  if and only if it is not possible both for all of  $S_1$  to  $S_j$  to be true and  $S_n$  not true.
- 6 It is relatively easy, it should be said, only following in the wake of the brilliant and ingenious work of Frege and Tarski. More on Tarski later.
- 7 The truth-value of a sentence is just its being true or its being false.
- 8 In nineteenth century it was thought that, because of variations in the orbit of the planet Mercury not otherwise predicted by Newtonian physics, there must be a planet orbiting even closer to the Sun, and 'Vulcan' was introduced as a name for it. It turned out that there is no such planet. The behaviour of Mercury is explained by Einsteinian physics. It's this example of a serious use in science of a name which *turned out* to be empty which I have in mind here (rather than the explicitly fictional home planet of Spock in *Star Trek*).
- 9 The point about *obligatory* association is glossed over surprisingly often. See Evans, 1982, section 1.4, esp. pp. 15–16, for a nice account of sense which emphasizes the point.
- 10 The notion of an abstraction here can be illustrated by an account of sense suggested by Gareth Evans (1982, esp. section 1.5): modes of presentation are picked out in terms of *ways of succeeding in thinking about* a particular object, so that two thinkers entertain the same MoP when they think about the same object in the same way. On this type of account, concerns about the peculiar status of senses as abstract objects, and about how we are able to grasp/access them, appear to become less pressing.
- 11 This is a controversial proposal, but it deserves some consideration. It might be objected that the suggested idiosyncratic-modes-of-presentation view would fail to account for the way in which informative identities can be used to communicate quite specific information; but speakers can be confident that they deploying the same or similar modes of presentation in particular situations for reasons other than that these are components of name meaning. It is striking that many of the most plausible examples in this area feature definite descriptions (e.g. 'The point of intersection of *a* and *b* is then the same as the point of intersection of *b* and *c*' in relation to the triangle example noted in the chapter on Frege). More on definite descriptions shortly.
- 12 Frege has a response to this problem (see section 8 of the chapter on Frege), but that response itself faces difficulties.
- 13 Frege quite often sketched attributions of sense to proper names using definite descriptions. As a result it has been suggested he simply held a view similar to Russell's, or that he *had* to hold such a view in order to cash out the notion of sense. It is not obvious that either of these suggestions is correct (see Evans, 1982, section 1.5, and McDowell, 1977).
- 14 See Kripke, 1980, esp. Lecture II. See also section 4 of the chapter on Kripke, and Sainsbury, 2005, section 1.4, for sketches of Kripke's objections.
- 15 It might be responded that the principle is methodological, and embodies a challenge to those who would claim meaningfulness for sentences that lack empirical

content of the relevant kind to explain how it is that these sentences are meaningful.

- 16 It is an open question whether Quine establishes a degree of indeterminacy concerning meaning which is sufficiently high to completely undermine any claim to theoretical respectability, particularly when we take into account the connections made between the truth-conditions of sentences by the repeated appearance of words in different combinations. For an interesting discussion see Wright, 1997.
- 17 This is a rough characterization of Davidson's aim. See Kirk Ludwig's important remarks on the exact nature of the Davidson's project in his chapter below.
- 18 The question of the relations between understanding of (or what we might call semantic competence with) expressions of particular kinds and matters of broader individual psychology is a fascinating one. The idea that that the connections are relatively simple and direct has been seriously questioned. For example, where it once seemed that semantic competence with a name must consist in some kind of extra-linguistic, mental or cognitive connection with its referent, the possibility of more complex pictures have opened up, including pictures on which semantic competence is a matter of being a participant in a public linguistic *practice* of use of the name. For further discussion of the latter sort of view, see section 5 of the chapter on Kripke, and Sainsbury, 2005, chapter 3, esp. sections 5–7.
- 19 You will find disagreements between chapter authors both on points of interpretation and on substantive philosophical issues.

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