

Introduction

Anthony Coleman
Ivan Welty

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In the middle part of the twentieth century, appeals to the way language is used by ordinary speakers in everyday circumstances became common among certain philosophers. For those philosophers, such appeals were a central part of the way they approached philosophical problems and evaluated philosophical theories, both old and new. "Ordinary language philosophy" was the term used to designate this style of philosophy, and although its practitioners differed in the particulars of their strategies, it can be said that they nevertheless formed a movement.

The idea that attention to the ordinary usage of language is important for evaluating philosophical theories did not originate with ordinary language philosophy. Note, for example, the grounds on which Thomas Reid reprimanded Hume in the following passage:

Philosophers ought not to escape censure when they corrupt a language, by using words in a way which the purity of language will not admit. I find fault with Mr. Hume's phraseology...because he gives the name of perceptions to every operation of the mind. Love is a perception, hatred a perception; desire is a perception, will is a perception; and, by the same rule, a doubt, a question, a command, is a perception. This is an intolerable abuse of language, which no philosopher has authority to introduce. (Reid, 1983, 144-145)

In fact, the contrast between ordinary ways of using language and philosophical discourse has always been noticed by philosophers. What was new in ordinary language philosophy was the thoroughgoing commitment among its practitioners to attention to the nuances of ordinary language, as a central part of their philosophical method.

Ordinary language philosophy is widely considered to be a failed project. Some criticisms of the movement are by now familiar:

- Philosophy is, or should be, concerned with the foundations of knowledge, the relation between mind and body, the nature of justice, and other such issues, not with what ordinary people think and do.
- Practitioners of ordinary language philosophy fail to distinguish between the semantic and pragmatic features of language.
- Practitioners of ordinary language philosophy make claims about how 'we' use words based solely on how *they* use words, but such a sample size is far too small to yield the wanted results.

The contributors to this volume scrutinize these and other criticisms, while arguing for ordinary language philosophy's continued relevance.

In her essay, "Reconsidering Ordinary Language Philosophy: Malcolm's (Moore's) Ordinary Language Argument", Sally Parker Ryan reconstructs Norman Malcolm's argument for the claim that 'ordinary language is correct language.' Malcolm famously made this claim as an interpretation of G. E. Moore's defense of common sense, an interpretation that Moore himself rejected. Taken at face value, Malcolm's claim seems clearly false. But Ryan makes a compelling case that, when understood properly, Malcolm's claim is quite plausible. This constitutes a partial answer to the charge that philosophy is or should be about things other than how people ordinarily use language. If ordinary language is by and large correct language, then insofar as a philosophical position (e.g., skepticism) implies that ordinary language is not correct, that position is false.

In his essay, "Is Wittgenstein a Contextualist?", Alberto Voltolini discovers interesting grounds for rejecting the criticism that ordinary language philosophy fails to distinguish between pragmatic and semantic aspects of language. Radical contextualists believe that the context sensitivity of truth-conditions is a pervasive feature of language. Voltolini argues that Wittgenstein was not a contextualist in this sense. Instead, Wittgenstein believed that the context-sensitivity of *linguistic meaning*, conceived of as use, is a pervasive feature of language. So, far from ignoring the distinction between pragmatics and semantics, Wittgenstein, according to Voltolini, had a sophisticated view about the context sensitivity of use and its implications for the nature of meaning.

Paul Grice made a distinction between conditions that are conversationally implicated by an assertion that *p* and conditions that are part of the meaning of *p*. He also claimed that ordinary language philosophers often conflate the two. In his essay, "Grice's Unspeakable Truths", Jeff Johnson challenges Grice's view. According to Grice, conversational implicatures can be detected through what he called a 'cancellability' test. Grice claimed that by applying the cancellability test to examples of linguistic usage investigated by ordinary language philosophers, it could be shown that those

philosophers mistook conversational implicatures for aspects of meaning. Johnson argues that Grice's application of the cancellability test begs the question against ordinary language philosophers. He also argues that it's unclear whether the cancellability test is even a reliable way to detect conversational implicatures.

Experimental philosophy has been thought by some to represent an improvement over ordinary language philosophy, in particular, a broadening of its evidence base beyond the single philosopher consulting his or her own intuitions to the statistically significant sample drawn from the general population. In his essay, "The Experimental Turn and Ordinary Language", Constantine Sandis challenges this view, arguing that the methods of experimental philosophy are not suited to deliver the sorts of results wanted by the ordinary language philosopher. According to Sandis, ordinary language philosophy is concerned with the norms that govern linguistic usage whereas experimental philosophy is concerned with psychological explanations of why people have the intuitions they do. The two movements, therefore, do not share the same goal.

Jonathan Trigg, in his paper "The Philosophy of Ordinary Language Is a Naturalistic Philosophy", advocates for a sharp distinction between the philosophy of mind and a science of the mind. He does so by considering the question of whether psychological activities like perceiving, remembering, believing, etc. can be sensibly attributed to parts of persons, e.g. brains. He argues that, contrary to the claims of some neuroscientists, our ordinary ways of talking about such activities suggest that the answer is 'no'. Trigg considers several objections to the appeal to ordinary language in a context that some would consider purely scientific, and makes a strong case that the philosophy of mind cannot be divorced from our ordinary talk about the mind.

Taken together, these papers fulfill the editors' aim of a contemporary reconsideration of ordinary language philosophy, and thereby suggest that, as so often in philosophy, old lessons are as likely to fall to neglect and change of fashion as they are to superior wisdom.

References

Reid, Thomas (1983). *Inquiry and Essays*. ed. Ronald Beanblossom and Keith Lehrer. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.