

Jerold J. Katz, *Metaphysics of Meaning*. Cambridge (Mass.), London: MIT (Bradford Book), 1990.

The title "Metaphysics of Meaning" is promising a lot, but the content is rather deceptive. Indeed, throughout the whole book J. Katz is trying to emphasize the already known claims of his own semantic theory, and in the 320 pages of his new book, very little unexplored and undiscussed data is available. On the contrary, in that discouraging and complicated book the author is constantly repeating himself. And although the book is written in a smooth style, a not initiated reader will not find his way through that labyrinth of sentences, containing an abundance of empty words and full of irritating sophisms.

Why, in my opinion, is "Metaphysics of Meaning" so unsuccessful? Well, I think that the principal reason for the miscarry of the book lies in the fact that Katz is so eager to prove that opposing philosophical views are wrong, that he neglects to be severe about his own argumentation. Additionally, in his precipitation to prove that the others are erroneous he neglects often to prove that his standpoints are right. Moreover, if the author needs so many pages only to demonstrate the soundness of an already endlessly debated theory, the outcome must, as a matter of course, result in a stale brew. Hence if the idiom "good wine needs no bush" has any significance, Katz is asking us to swallow a sour mixture indeed. And in my opinion, sour it is! For the whole book through the reader is in the midst of an endless quarrel, an uninterrupted and tiresome fight against the enemies of Katz, living beings just as ghosts, thinkers who are not ready to subscribe his particular *intentionalist semantic* views. And in that everlasting battle he is hunting notably the scalps of Wittgenstein, Quine and Kripke. But when the smoke above the killing field has risen, the reader notices that the prosecuted philosophers still seem to be on their pedestal. And on the other hand it looks as if Katz has disappeared; his theories are pushed behind a camouflage of worn-out words and argumentations: the author has torn apart the structure of a so promising book, which, by its displeasing aggressive atmosphere, turned out to be dull and monotonous.

In short, it may be right that philosophizing means inevitably to be in disagreement with other thinkers, but Katz is doing too much of a good thing; his only ambition is to blame the others and to prove how wrong and how ignorant they are. Too much violence for my taste. Is

“Metaphysics of Meaning” then a useless book? Well, maybe not, for if we learned nothing new about the theories of Katz, the reader may have a better idea of the views of Wittgenstein and Quine. But let us analyse the content of the book. In the introduction Katz tells us that he will call the line of linguistic naturalism of Wittgenstein and Quine into question, and that he will try to prove it is a false trail. Therefore he will analyse the texts of these philosophers regarding the topic.

His critique of Wittgenstein leads to four principal conclusions. The critique of Quine is to be found in conclusion V. In Conclusion I Katz argues: “Wittgenstein’s circumscription of theories of meaning is too narrow; hence, his critique of theories of meaning, though successful in the particular case of theories against which he directs his argument in the “Philosophical Investigations”, is unsuccessful in the general case. The critique of Wittgenstein is directed mainly against the so called “Begriffsschrift Theories” (Frege), and therefore does not eliminate all theoretical conceptions of meaning”. J.J. Katz thinks he can exhibit the type of hypothesis against which the critique of Wittgenstein fails. In his opinion there is a theory of meaning which is immune for the assaults of the latter, specifically demonstrated in his work “Philosophical Investigations”. In formulating the arguments for this conclusion, J.J. Katz says he has adopted the following strategy. He simultaneously pursues two lines of developments, one starting at the beginning of “Philosophical Investigations” and running through each of its particular arguments *against* theories of meaning. The other starts with certain familiar and intuitively clear facts about the meaning of expressions in natural language and, step by step, works from them to a theory of meaning substantially different from the cluster of “Begriffsschrift Theories”.

His idea (as he himself claims) behind the strategy is this. He focuses on the points where these two lines of development intersect, that is, where one of Wittgenstein’s arguments challenges a step in the construction of a theory of meaning. Katz tries to show, at every such point, either that the argument is inapplicable, because of some significant difference between the theory in question and “Begriffsschrift Theories”, or that the argument is inadequate, because of some inherent difficulty. And Katz claims, that if the second path of development (that of the intuitively meaning in natural languages) is not blocked at any point, the theory that emerges from it, escapes Wittgenstein’s critique.

It may be right that by doing so Katz’s theory escapes from the criti-

que of Wittgenstein, but it proves nothing about the correctness of the theory of Katz. Claiming he must be right solely on the pretended fact the other is wrong, is not serious. We are not facing here a dilemma, and an argument like that is misleading the reader.

In Conclusion II Wittgenstein's paradox about rule following, as Katz holds it, is an extension of earlier arguments against semantic theorists, and it depends only upon the general success of his critique of theories of meaning. Before he comes to the paradox itself, Katz analyses the argumentation in "Philosophical Investigations" (199-201) which goes as follows: "it is not possible that there should have been only one occasion on which someone obeyed a rule ... it is not possible that there should have been only one occasion on which a report was made, an order given of understood..., to make a report, to give an order, to play chess, are customs ... The paradox goes as follows: if everything can be made out to accord with a rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it..."

By his argument for Conclusion II, Katz tries to show how Wittgenstein's arguments against theories of meaning prior to his statement of paradox about rule following, enter essentially into the paradox itself.

In Conclusion III J.J. Katz claims that the paradox about rule following can be shown not to arise in connection with the type of theory of meaning he is defending. He tries to explain how his point of view enables him to formulate an un-Wittgensteinean but nonetheless unparadoxical account of following a rule. To do so Katz tries in chapter 3 to hold his theory far from Wittgenstein's application of "language of use", and out of the reach of "family resemblances". Here again, he is not very convincing. On the contrary, he makes the reader uneasy with all sorts of argumentations which are not to the point. On page 136 he even brings Socrates and Meno's paradox on the scene to show how paradoxes, mistakes and circular reasoning may turn up. But in his criteria and confused formulations of his own proto-theory and his top-down-structure he is not free himself of foggy and puzzling thinking. Indeed, on page 142 we find: "The critical point is that the abstract objects invoked are, on one hand, expression and sentence types and, on the other, the properties, relations and propositions which are their senses. It is the structure of their correlation - which together comprise the grammar of the language - that make the abstract objects invoked in the criterion the proper kind of abstract object. A realist version of semantic essentialism does not face the problem of trying to manufacture linguistic

meanings out of entirely unsuitable raw materials, because, on this version, the materials with which application begins are linguistic meanings!" ... Yes, no doubt!

Conclusion IV. Here J.J. Katz holds that Wittgenstein does not succeed in making his case against the traditional metaphysical view of philosophy in favour of his own therapeutic view. As Katz sees it, Wittgenstein does not succeed in eliminating theoretical conceptions of meaning, to put his notion of use in their place. He is neither able to show that metaphysical sentences are a form of nonsense, which arise when words are taken too far from their "original home".

We may agree with that explanation, Wittgenstein's arguments are rather poor, but it is impossible to accept what Katz claims. Indeed, he argues as follows : "...If Wittgenstein has not succeeded in putting his own notion of use in the place of theoretical conceptions of meaning because one of these conceptions survives his criticisms, then there is a theoretical basis on which metaphysical sentences can be meaningful...". That is logic in the form of a hard boiled egg : it brings nothing forward and it is hard to stomach. For how can Katz reasonably claim that there is *a theoretical basis on which metaphysical sentences can be meaningful*, because there is no evidence of the Wittgensteinean statements? There are many other philosophers with divergent kinds of opinions, and by refuting one of them the whole lot will not be automatically in tears, or will be glad to accept the wisdom of Katz. He might be right that there is a basis for metaphysical reasoning, but not on the ill-used arguments he is claiming.

Conclusion V. In these pages J.J. Katz is fighting contemporary naturalism, based on Wittgenstein's and Quine's arguments against intentionalist theories of meaning. He argues that if he succeeds in refuting the standpoints of both philosophers he will have discarded the whole cluster of adepts to naturalism. Here again we are facing a rather poor and misleading argumentation. Naturalism is not depending only on Wittgenstein and Quine.

However in chapter 5 Katz is examining Quine's argument for indeterminacy from a new angle. He claims that Quine is wrong in his scepticism about translation. Here again he uses the same logic which he applies to match Wittgenstein ... "If I am right, (that the argumentation of indeterminacy of Quine does not work) there is a straightforward sense in which the indeterminacy thesis is refuted". But there is more to be

unhappy about.

He claims that scepticism about translation, like scepticism about other things of which common sense assures us, incurs a burden of proof. I may agree, but whose common sense is involved? For my common sense is obviously different of that of Katz. Indeed, my experience with translations learns me that word-to-word translation is not possible. At many occasions the best thing to do is a parallel translation, whereby a description is given as near as possible to the interpreted text. If Katz argues that literal translation must be possible, my common sense as well as my experience tells me he is wrong. Besides, it is very precarious to give examples of good translations, for the translation of "What is his aunt's name?" (199) in the French sentence "Comment s'appelle sa tante?" is a good one, but it not synonymous as he claims. Synonymous would be: "Quel est le nom de sa tante?". If Katz speaks French, he will know that.

Besides, the verb "s'appeler" in French means in English "to call", and the French is a reflexive verb while "to call" is not. So to use the one for the other in the two languages is possible, but it will not be an exact translation; there will always be a slight difference between the sentences in which the verbs are used.

On page 180 Katz sees a difference between Quinean radical translation and actual translation. His grounds to conclude that a Quinean radical translation establishes no more than the unknowability of meaning, is as poor as his previous argumentations. Moreover, Thomas Kuhn has convincingly demonstrated in his "Structure of Scientific Revolutions" that every perception is prejudiced and coloured by the beliefs of the observer. Deduced from that "paradigm" it seems obvious that a text is generally never understood by different readers in the same way.

To conclude I will give an example of another kind of argumentation which is to be found on many pages of the book, a procedure which continuously upsets the reader. He says for example on page 201: "...I made it quite clear that I was prepared to grant Quine's conclusions about translation and about semantics *if he showed that there* are no such criteria (of independent controls), but I argued that *he showed no such things...*". I estimate those inferences as pure sophisms. For in the same line of thought I can argue: "I am prepared to believe in heaven but you did not prove their are angels", the former nor the latter are seriously and logically acceptable.

It is rather disappointing to read such arguments as put forward by J.J. Katz. "Metaphysics of Meaning" is in my point of view not among his best.

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