In “dialectica”, 66, 2, 2012, pp. 300-303. The definitive version is available at wileyonlinelibrary.com

Paolo Casalegno, *Verità e significato: Scritti di filosofia del linguaggio*, edited by Pasquale Frascolla, Diego Marconi and Elisa Paganini, Roma: Carocci, 2011, 272 pp., €23, ISBN 978-88-430-5906-5.

*Verità e significato* is a posthumous collection of nearly all the philosophical papers published by Paolo Casalegno before his untimely death. Casalegno had an exceptionally clear mind, as was immediately obvious to those who had the chance to talk to him. What this collection shows is that he applied himself to some of the most central issues in the contemporary philosophy of language and reached highly interesting, if mainly negative, results. Unfortunately, even those papers that originally appeared in English (two of them on *dialectica*) are published in Italian. We are convinced that the entire community of analytic philosophers would greatly benefit from an English translation.

Casalegno deployed his talent in criticizing some of the main programs in twentieth-century analytic philosophy of language. His criticisms are usually quite specific, and one may have the impression that they did not stem from a unified view. We do not believe that this is so. On the contrary, a deep commitment appears to be at work in the background to the pre-theoretical image of how language adheres to the world, namely “that chunks of reality correspond to words and that, in virtue of this correlation between words and things, sentences have well determined truth-conditions” (p. 15). This roughly means that the notions of *truth* and *reference*, as classically understood, are to be taken as the starting point of any philosophical theorizing about language. Casalegno devoted a great deal of his time and efforts to arguing for this commitment. He thus came to the conclusion that “if one seriously sets out to articulate a semantics that is systematic and explanatory, he or she will quite soon realize that recourse to the notions of truth and reference cannot be avoided” (p. 16). At the same time, however, Casalegno was perfectly aware that vindicating that pre-theoretical image and those classical notions has proven to be very difficult. This amounts to a “sort of antinomy” which he went as far as considering as “the central problem of current philosophy of language” (p. 15).

To some extent, all the papers collected in this volume, spanning over a period of more than 25 years, are informed by these general views. A group of them (‘Tre osservazioni su verità e riferimento’, ‘Inscrutabilità quiniana e inscrutabilità totale’, ‘La componente referenziale e la componente logica nella semantica di Fodor’ and ‘Verità e attribuzioni di veridicità’) directly address the issue of the centrality of the notions of truth and reference and the thorny problems they raise. Two papers (‘Approcci alla quantificazione’ and ‘Le proprietà modali della verità: problemi e punti di vista’) deal with particular aspects of truth-conditional semantics. Finally, ‘Su un impiego dell’uso. Ovvero la ricognizione dummettiana del significato’, ‘Come interpretare l’argomento antirealista di Dummett?’, ‘Un problema concernente le condizioni di asseribilità’, ‘Concetti logici e inferenze logiche’ and ‘Ragioni per credere e asserzione’ are devoted to examining, from different angles, what was probably the most significant attempt in twentieth-century philosophy at criticizing, and dispensing with, the notions of truth and reference as classically understood.

In ‘Tre osservazioni su verità e riferimento’ (1995) Casalegno focuses on the “antinomy” we mentioned above: the notions of truth and reference are extremely hard to vindicate and yet deeply ingrained in our commonsensical view of how language works. What is more, no satisfactory substitute seems to exist for them in semantic theory. He frankly admits that he has no idea of how to solve the antinomy. In fact, he devotes the paper to criticizing two attempts at solving it by vindicating the two notions. One consists in *naturalizing* them, the other in claiming that they are to be taken as *theoretical* notions, whose justification resides in nothing more than the explanatory success of the theories employing them – e.g. truth-conditional semantics. As to the former attempt, he offers a surprisingly simple logical argument to the effect that the naturalization of reference is doomed to fail. Whether or not the argument is in the end convincing, there is no denying that it provides food for thought.

In ‘Verità e attribuzioni di veridicità’ (2005), Casalegno focuses on another reason why the notion of truth is useful. By means of an ingenious thought experiment, he argues that a truth predicate allows one to gain information through testimony that one cannot gain without it. Indeed, he shows that predicates such as “is verified” or “is trustworthy” are no substitute.

Casalegno believed that reference is even more worrisome than truth. The correspondence between words and particular chunks of reality, which is taken for granted by common sense, seems to be undermined by Willard Van Orman Quine’s inscrutability arguments. Casalegno pointed out that it is by no means easy to resist those arguments. For example, the attempt to this effect made by Jerry Fodor in *The Elm and the Expert* simply fails, as Casalegno forcefully argues in ‘La componente referenziale e la componente logica nella semantica di Fodor’ (1998). Even worse, Quine’s arguments may be strengthened. Indeed, ‘Inscrutabilità quiniana e inscrutabilità totale’ (1998) aims at showing that Quine’s conclusions could be even more radical: if the only data available to the translator consist in the acts of assenting to and dissenting from *gavagai*-sentences in particular stimulatory situations, “ice-cream” is no worse a translation of “gavagai” than “undetached rabbit parts”. If there is inscrutability, it is total.

Casalegno, however, was not only interested in discussing general philosophical problems concerning the commonsensical notions of truth and reference. He also directly contributed to what he took to be the only game in town as far as the semantics of natural languages is concerned: *truth-conditional* or *model-theoretic semantics*. With regard to this, in ‘Approcci alla quantificazione’ (1989) he examines some contributions to the study of quantification in natural languages (generalized quantifiers and discourse representation theories) that had just appeared at the time, while in ‘Le proprietà modali della verità: problemi e punti di vista’ (1997) he shows how deep the issue of the modal properties of the T-sentences can go.

In the last three decades of the twentieth century, Michael Dummett’s theory of meaning based on assertibility-conditions appeared to be the only serious rival to the truth-conditional approach. Casalegno’s interest in Dummett’s program never failed, as is certified by the fact that, among others, the earliest paper in this collection (‘Su un impiego dell’uso. Ovvero la ricognizione dummettiana del significato’, 1982, written together with Ernesto Napoli) as well as the latest are directly or indirectly concerned with it. He lamented that the program never went beyond the preliminary stage but also had specific misgivings as to particular tenets of Dummett’s philosophy. For one thing, he was unhappy with the very notion of assertibility-conditions. While it is obvious that a wide range of sentences do not admit of conclusive verification, he argued that the idea of non conclusive assertibility-conditions is hardly coherent (‘Un problema concernente le condizioni di asseribilità’, 2000). For another thing, in ‘Come interpretare l’argomento antirealista di Dummett?’ (1997) he took issue with the cogency of Dummett’s main argument against the truth-conditional approach.

The claim that the meaning of the logical constants is constituted by the introduction and/or elimination rules governing them in a formal system of deduction formed an important part of Dummett’s approach to meaning and has recently been revived by proponents of inferential role semantics such as Christopher Peacocke and Paul Boghossian. In ‘Concetti logici e inferenze logiche’ (2004) Casalegno presents and discusses a number of examples that seem to raise serious doubts concerning this rather popular claim.

Finally, if one aims at substituting assertibility-conditions for truth-conditions, we are owed an account of what an assertion is and what norms it obeys. The last paper written by Casalegno (‘Ragioni per credere e asserzione’, 2008) argues against some alternatives to the so-called “knowledge rule”, advocated in recent years by Timothy Williamson, which states that one must assert that *p* only if he or she knows that *p*. If Casalegno is right, the notion of truth proves to be, once again, absolutely indispensable in accounting for linguistic practice, due to the intimate connection it has with the notion of knowledge, mentioned in the rule.

Let us conclude by stressing that in this review we have only tried to give the reader a rough idea of the breadth and import of the topics investigated by Casalegno. What we have not been able to do is to convey the subtlety and originality of most of his arguments. To appreciate them we believe there is no alternative but to read the collected papers themselves.

*Andrea Bianchi*

*Università degli Studi di Parma*

*Marco Santambrogio*

*Università degli Studi di Parma*