Henri Lauener's Forward to H.G. Callaway, *Context for Meaning and Analysis* (Rodopi, 1993)

FORWARD

This book provides a concise overview, with excellent historical and systematic coverage, of the problems of the philosophy of language in the analytic tradition. Howard Callaway explains and explores the relation of language to the philosophy of mind and culture, to the theory of knowledge, and to ontology. He places the question of linguistic meaning at the center of his investigations. The teachings of authors who have become classics in the field, including Frege, Russell, Carnap, Quine, Davidson, and Putnam are critically analyzed. I share completely his conviction that contemporary Anglo-American philosophy follows the spirit of the enlightenment in insisting on intellectual sincerity, clarity, and the willingness to meet scientific doubts or objections openly.

Under the influence of Quine and Dewey, Callaway's approach to philosophy takes a pragmatic turn, culminating in a non-reductive naturalism. As against the positivists, he insists that consideration of values and intentions are unavoidable in the pursuit and growth of knowledge. In spite of differences in background and temperament—I see myself closer to Kant than to Dewey—I find satisfaction in the fact that our views stand in some substantial agreement. In particular, we agree about the context-bound character of meaning, a point which naturally arises from my method of systematic relativization to contexts of action. Remaining differences, so far as I can see, derive from variation in the forms of holism which we put forward. This point shows itself most clearly in our divergent treatments of analyticity.

Along with the majority in the philosophy of science, including the author of the present work, I am convinced of the revisability in principle of all claims, but I do not believe we are therefore forced to do without strict distinctions between analytic and synthetic statements or between language and theory, though these distinctions have been quite generally rejected since the publication of "Two Dogmas of Empiricism." Following Quine, Callaway links the concept of analyticity with ideas of incorrigibility, unchangeable meanings and absolutely necessary truth. But this can be avoided, if we renounce the extreme positions of epistemic and semantic holism, i.e. if we do not insist upon a single total theory, and thus reject the view of language as a universal medium. Instead, the concept of analyticity must be relativized to contexts determined by the applicable language and theory. With our choice of a particular system of representation, we create a relative a priori which allows us to designate certain sentences as not refutable through experience. In this way, we create truths on the basis of conventions, which are not absolutely necessary, but do follow with logical necessity from accepted axioms and definitions within the appropriate context. Although the selected language-system may prove itself unsuitable on pragmatic grounds and therefore be given up, this does not mean that the analytic statements have been refuted by the facts.

Callaway does hold that truths regarded as conventionally fixed may change over time, but he is less skeptical of meanings than Quine, and he has consistently rejected any extreme holism in favor of a moderate or contextualized version. I agree—insisting, however, that although conventionally fixed truth is a "passing trait" in the evolution of science this does not prevent us from holding certain sentences firmly, i.e., as subject to a contextually justified principle of conservativism, so long as we continue to make use of the conceptual framework to which it belongs. In such situations, Callaway speaks of "contextually a priori" statements. Though rejecting any notion of analyticity, he favors a contextualized notion of meaning and of the a priori.

The author brings a decisive insight to light when writing that the key to identity-conditions of meanings is "their semantic characterization within the semantic characterization of an entire theory" (Introduction, p. 6). The holistic conception should not, as I hold, be applied to a total language/theory in Quine's sense, but only to a specific theory, effectively used in the context of action. According to my view, the meaning of the theoretical terms introduced by that theory is constituted by two components: their intension and their extension. The former is determined by the empirical laws in which they occur, while the latter is fixed by the interpretation (in the model-theoretic sense). Callaway's view, developed in a series of papers, and brought to a fuller presentation in the present book, seems to converge with such a conception of meaning—with the terminological difference, however, that he calls "meaning" or "intention" what I call "intension." He

expressly recognizes the constitutive role of language in knowledge and imposes proper limits upon the extreme Quinean theses of the indeterminacy of meaning and the inscrutability of reference: "Language places constraints upon what we can say, and in consequence it places constraints upon what we can say there is in the world. Any account of what exists requires a language adequate to the task" (p. 13). Part of the point here is that some language-systems are more adequate than others as used within a given context. Quine's universalistic conception of language leads him to the claim that "...what particular objects there may be is indifferent to the truth of observation sentences" (Quine 1990, p. 31). In opposition to this claim, I hold with Callaway that the meanings of terms which occur in observation sentences are dependent on theory. In consequence, the truth of such a sentence, according to Tarski's conception, presupposes the existence of empirically discoverable objects in the range of values of the variables. This forces the conclusion that sentences recognized as true merely on the basis of their (holophrastically conceived) stimulus meanings have no place in scientific theory and that they cannot therefore be used in testing theories. (Cf. Callaway 1991, pp. 318-19.) This is the reason why I firmly believe that Quine is wrong when claiming, from his behavioristic point of view, that truth precedes reference.

Callaway's critical approach to the authors treated here leads him to a well-balanced position which avoids extreme consequences. This position squares well with my views, on the whole. While I sympathize with the pragmatic traits of his philosophy arising from Dewey, I have doubts concerning his naturalism, since I am not prepared to assign any clear sense to talk of the (external) truth of a theory in the manner that scientific realists do. Callaway, for his part, insists on a non-reductive realism and rejects talk of "external" vs. "internal" truth. My anti-naturalistic attitude also leaves me skeptical with regard to any purely descriptive, empirical theory of meaning whereas he generally follows Quine and Davidson regarding the possibility of empirical inquiry in this area. My own view is that meanings are not factual regularities discovered in nature; they rather have to be produced by means of continually repeated intentional activities. A community of language users must come to agreement on a set of rules which prescribe the correct usage of expressions within a context. Against naturalism, I do not believe that normative sentences can be reduced to descriptive ones—a further point on which I agree with the author of the present book, who urges, however, in a typically naturalistic view that regularities of language, and regularities of habit, precede their normative systemization.

The doubts I have broached do not concern the quality of the Callaway's work. They only touch on differences in philosophical perspective. Part of the value of his book consists precisely in opening further opportunities for philosophical debate. It represents a valuable contribution to contemporary philosophy of language, not only for the general public but also for the specialist. Those who are interested in the problems of language, and the problem of linguistic meaning in particular, will find an ample fund of solid information and much stimulation to further independent thought.

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