The Crisis of Method in Contemporary Analytic Philosophy, by Avner Baz. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. 211.

This is the second book by Baz that aims to show that a big chunk of contemporary philosophy is fundamentally misguided. His first book, *When Words Are Called For: A Defense of Ordinary Language Philosophy* (2012) adopted a therapeutic approach (in the Wittgensteinian style) to problems in contemporary epistemology, arguing that when properly thought through, the way philosophers talk about 'knowing' that something is the case ultimately does not make sense. Baz's goal in his second book is less therapeutic and more constructive: he aims to start a methodological revolution (in the Kuhnian sense)—to shake contemporary philosophers out of the unconscious habits of normal science and provoke them into making a radical change in the methods they use to do philosophy and the basic assumptions that motivate those methods.

The 'crisis' in the title of Baz's book is supposed to apply to the so-called 'method of cases'. The method of cases is an approach to investigating the concepts that are the meanings of expressions like 'intentionally', 'deliberately', and 'knows', or the properties those concepts represent, such as doing something intentionally, or doing something deliberately, or knowing that something is the case. The method involves considering whether real or imagined cases (situations, scenarios, etc.) fall within the extension of the concept being investigated, or equivalently, whether the concept 'applies' to those cases.

The method of cases can be practiced from the armchair. For example, do the words 'intentionally' and 'deliberately' mean the same thing? One way to begin to answer that question is to see whether it is ever possible to accurately describe an action as being done intentionally, but not deliberately, or vice-versa. If it is, then that is evidence that the words have different extensions, and therefore have different meanings. J.L. Austin was an artful armchair practitioner of the method of cases. For example, Austin imagines a situation in which he is rushing to 'quell a riot', sees his servant's child's go-cart in the middle of the road, and runs over it with his car because there is no time to move it. He says that this is a case of doing something—running over the go-cart—deliberately, but not intentionally, because he never intended to run over it (Austin, 1966, p. 432).

The method of cases can also be practiced using the experimental methods of the cognitive sciences. A philosopher worried about the limitations of her own parochial judgments about cases might ask lecture halls of undergraduates or pay hundreds of Amazon Mechanical Turk workers to consider cases such as Austin's go-cart case to see how 'ordinary' people apply the expressions 'deliberately' and 'intentionally' (or the translations of those expressions in other languages) to various actions. Some informative, statistically significant patterns of application might show up in the resulting responses that support or challenge thinking of the meanings of 'intentionally' and 'deliberately' in certain ways. It might turn out, for example, that most ordinary people don't apply 'deliberately' and 'intentionally' to

the go-cart case in the way Austin describes. That data can then be explained using various theoretical resources: does the observed pattern of use reflect a difference in the meaning of the expressions, or is it best explained as a more general pragmatic phenomenon? Call such an approach to probing the meaning of expressions the 'laboratory' (in contrast with the 'armchair') approach to the method of cases.

For the past 15 years, advocates of the armchair and laboratory approaches to the method of cases have been arguing with each other over which approach is preferable. While Baz says that 'there is... little question that experimental philosophy constitutes one of the most significant developments in analytic philosophy in the last couple of decades' (p. 1), he objects to the way philosophers have applied the method of cases, whether practiced in the armchair or in the laboratory, on the grounds that practicing it requires accepting an assumption that (he argues) has led us astray in our theorizing about central philosophical notions such as knowledge, causation, and freedom. The problematic assumption that practitioners of the method of cases make, according to Baz, is that when a philosopher asks whether a word with a particular meaning or a concept applies to a case (Baz calls these kinds of questions 'theorists' questions'), those questions are

> in principle, in order—in the simple sense that they are clear enough and may be answered correctly or incorrectly—and that, as competent speakers, we ought to understand those questions and be able to answer them correctly, just on the basis of the descriptions of the cases and our mastery of the words in which the questions are couched. (p. 6)

Baz calls this 'the minimal assumption'.

In an illuminating chapter (Ch. 4), Baz argues persuasively that the view in philosophy of language known as 'contextualism' poses a challenge to the minimal assumption. Contextualism is the view that the truth conditions of what is said by the use of a sentence are not fixed by the conventional meaning of the words in the sentence and the way they are combined. There are versions of contextualism that virtually everyone accepts, and versions that are much more controversial. The least controversial contextualist view is that the truth conditions of what is said by the use of sentences containing indexical expressions like 'I', 'here', 'now', 'he', 'she', 'today', and so on varies depending on what context the sentence is used in, in more or less obvious ways (who the speaker is, what day it is, what the speaker's communicative intentions are, etc.). More controversial types of contextualism claim that the truth conditions of what is said by the use of sentences containing certain expressions which aren't obviously indexicals, like 'know' or 'might' or 'good', are not fixed by the conventional meaning of those sentences, but can vary in different contexts in more or less unobvious ways. 'Radical' contextualists maintain that the conventional meaning of a sentence (with the possible exception of mathematical sentences) is never sufficient to fix the truth condition of what is said by a use of that sentence.

If some version of contextualism is correct, then that poses a problem for the 'minimal assumption': If the theorist's question contains a context-sensitive expression, then it is not guaranteed, simply in virtue of grasping the meaning of the words used by the theorist or experimenter to raise a question and describe a case, that the person trying to answer the theorist's question, who may be in a different context, will automatically be able to grasp its content.

Baz's worries about the minimal assumption are, in one sense, not new. For at least a couple of decades, experimenters have recognized the possibility that what experimenters intend to communicate when they pose a question in an experimental context may be systematically misunderstood by participants, and they have designed their experiments accordingly. For example, Schwarz (1996) discusses a series of experiments reevaluating children's performance on Piaget-style 'conservation tasks' that examine whether the experimenters' questions to the children are 'in principle, in order'. According to the standard experimental method of evaluating a child's understanding of the conservation of number, the experimenter arranges two quantities of objects—coins, or pieces of pasta, e.g.—in rows aligned in one to one correspondence, and asks 'Is there more here (pointing at the first row), more here (pointing at the second row), or are they the same number?' Young children generally can correctly respond to that first question. The experimenter, in view of the participant, then rearranges the items in one of the rows, making it longer, but not changing the number of items in the row. Finally, the experimenter again asks, 'Is there more here (pointing at the first row), more here (pointing at the second, longer, row), or are they the same number?' In standard versions of the conservation task, a majority of young children (about 2/3 in McGarrigle and Donaldson 1974) 'fail to conserve quantity' and choose the longer of the two lines in response to the second question. It has been hypothesized, however, that the apparent 'failure to conserve quantity' may arise from a reasonable reinterpretation of the experimenter's question: after all, why would the experimenter ask the same question *twice*, of the same quantity of objects, unless they intended to communicate something different with the second question? And since there's an obvious difference between the two lines of objects, namely their length, the experimenter must be asking about their length.

Experiments designed to evaluate this alternative explanation have varied whether the experimenter intentionally rearranges the objects (as in the standard design), or whether the objects are 'accidentally' rearranged (by a 'naughty' teddy bear in the McGarrigle and Donaldson study). In the accidental condition, the rate of successful conservation increased to 71.9% (up from 33.7% in the standard, intentional condition). The 'accidental' rearrangement makes it intelligible to participants why the experimenter would ask the same question again. This and similar experimental findings (for a summary, see Schwarz 1996) reveals how it is easy for experimenters, who of course know why they're asking a particular question, to fail to appreciate what their questions sound like from a participant's point of view, from which the experimenter's communicative intentions are opaque. There are there-

fore good reasons to agree with Baz that the 'minimal assumption' is problematic, but acknowledging those reasons does nothing to challenge the legitimacy of the method of cases. Any experimental situation in which a participant is asked to respond to a pragmatically odd question runs the risk that participants will understand the question in a way very different than the way the experimenter intends it to be understood. Addressing this worry may require some experimental ingenuity (getting a naughty teddy bear involved in the experiment, for example), but the existence of the worry shows that sensitive practitioners of the method of cases wouldn't accept the minimal assumption in the first place.

Baz's criticism of the 'minimal assumption' is much more radical than just diagnosing a pragmatic infelicity or contextual mismatch that can occur in non-optimally-designed experiments, however. He holds that the context in which the theorist raises her question is too barren and etiolated for it to do the work that an 'ordinary' context would do to fix the truth conditional content of what is said by a use of a sentence. Baz's view, unlike the pragmatic objection discussed above, is not that the theorist's question might be misunderstood, but that the theorist herself sometimes hasn't posed a question with a determinate sense in the first place.

Baz's view is related to the 'ordinary language'-style criticism of philosophical language in Clarke (1972). Clarke characterizes philosophical language in terms very similar to Baz, highlighting its separation from 'contextual wedlock'. Clarke says that 'The peculiarly philosophical character of questions and propositions is their 'purity'. What *we* ask, or affirm [when doing philosophy], is what the words with their meanings do *per se*. Our commitments, implications, are dictated solely by meanings' (p. 760). Clarke argues that the 'pure questions and propositions' raised by the philosopher are 'full-bodied in meaning, only if...our conceptual-human constitution is of a 'standard' type'. Being of a 'standard type' for Clarke requires having concepts that are 'self-sufficient', 'divorceable intact from our practices' (p. 761), and he argues that our concepts (including our concept of knowledge) are not like that. Another forerunner of Baz's view is Travis (1991, p. 243), who argues that G.E. Moore's statement 'I know I have hands' lacks the right 'surroundings' to make it either true or false.

One worry about Baz's claim that the theorist's questions about knowledge lack determinate sense is that, if Baz is right, then it should come as a surprise that participants' responses to questions posed in artificial experimental settings frequently display patterns that track theoretically significant differences in the cases and prompts. For example, in Turri et al. (2015), the rates at which participants classify cases as examples of someone knowing something range from 90% in what should be clear cases of knowledge, down to 12% in what should be clear cases of non-knowledge, with different kinds of Gettier-style cases being classified at various places in between those two extremes. If the theorist's question is raised outside the right kind of ordinary context which would make it possible for it to have a determinate sense, what would explain this and other similar patterns of experimental responses? (See Hansen 2018 for discussion of experiments relevant to this worry.)

Baz acknowledges that 'we are [not] altogether in the dark when we attempt to understand and answer the theorist's question', but he says that 'what guides us in giving our answers is at best an abstraction, and at worst a picture' (p. 175). But a convincing defense of the idea that a 'picture' or an 'abstraction' (rather than a concept) explains the apparently meaningful patterns of responses observed in a variety of experiments would itself require some substantial theory building and hypothesis testing.

The final, more constructive, component of the radical change that Baz wants to bring about in contemporary philosophy is a shift away from what he calls the 'representationalist conception of language', on which he argues the minimal assumption and the method of cases rest (p. 68). Baz argues that certain philosophical problems, like the 'lottery paradox' in epistemology, only arise as problems if one accepts the 'representationalist conception' of language. When that conception is abandoned, as Baz proposes it should be, he argues that many of the philosophical problems that analytic philosophers have been trying to solve will no longer arise.

Baz quotes a passage from Williamson as giving the 'gist' of the representationalist conception of language:

> [E]xpressions refer to items in the mostly non-linguistic world, the reference of complex expressions is a function of the reference of its constituents, and the reference of a sentence determines its truth value. (Williamson, 2007, p. 281)

Baz recognizes that the basic representationalist conception can be souped up to handle various context sensitive phenomena, so that it is expressions in a context that have references, rather than expressions themselves. He argues that a 'contextualist' view that treats expressions as functions from specific parts of context to references is still a form of the representationalist conception of language (p. 94).

In chapter 5, Baz sketches his preferred alternative to the representationalist conception of language, which he draws out of the work of Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty. Baz takes from Wittgenstein the 'functional pluralist' (p. 129 n. 11) view of words as 'tools' or 'instruments', in which a word's meaning is understood in terms of what 'work' it can do, rather than just what it refers to and how it can combine with other expressions (p. 128). From Merleau-Ponty, Baz adopts the idea that a word has meaning 'only as an instrument or vehicle of human expression' (p. 133). Both philosophers hold that it is the 'total speech act in the total speech situation' (to borrow J.L. Austin's phrase) that is the 'basic unit of linguistic sense or intelligibility', rather than the word or the sentence (p. 134). Understanding what work a word is doing requires first grasping the sense of the whole speech act in which it occurs, rather than building up the meaning of the sentence one utters out of the meaning of its parts. Baz emphasizes that grasping the sense of a speech act 'is, ultimately, a matter of coming to see [the speaker's] *point*—of being able to follow, and follow upon, her act of articulating and taking up a position in

an interpersonal world, orienting herself by means of words' (p. 137). Baz's alternative Wittgensteinian/Merleau-Pontyian conception of language, like the most radical forms of contextualism, emphasizes the

> synchronic and diachronic plasticity of language—the way in which what may be said with a word, or how it is to be understood, may always in principle be expanded creatively but at the same time naturally and comprehensibly, which means that the set of powers with which the history of a word's employment has endowed it and which makes it suitable for certain uses but not others—call it its 'meaning'—is not fixed, but rather is best thought of as an open-ended, and never fully determinate potentiality. (pp. 126–127)

According to Baz's Wittgensteinian/Merleau-Pontyian conception of language, the minimal assumption is unmotivated, because there is no guarantee that by using words ('knows', e.g.) that do some meaningful work in *some* contexts they will also do meaningful work in the theorist's context. But, as discussed above, the minimal assumption is already problematic if one accepts the uncontroversial view that it is possible to misunderstand what someone is trying to communicate even if you grasp the conventional meaning of the words they use.

Adopting the alternative conception of language is supposed to free us from many philosophical worries, such as explaining why we're happy to say that people can know things in many ordinary situations in which there is some chance that they're wrong, but we're reluctant to say that someone knows they've lost a lottery when their chances of losing are overwhelming. Baz argues in Chapter 1 that Hawthorne's (2003) treatment of the lottery paradox wrongly assumes that questions of the form 'Does S know that p?' have a determinate sense when they are raised by the theorist. Since such 'theorist's questions' do not have a determinate sense, no paradox arises.

But Baz's alternative conception of language is not free from its own philosophical worries. One central objection to any highly plastic conception of language is the 'over-generation' problem: such views have difficulty explaining the ways in which words *cannot* be given certain interpretations no matter what the context. Stanley (2007, p. 238) raised a version of this worry for radical contextualist theories that allow 'free pragmatic enrichment' by asking why an utterance of 'Every Frenchman is seated' can, in certain contexts, be used to say what 'Every Frenchman in the classroom is seated' can be used to say, but can never be used to say what 'Every Frenchman or Dutchman is seated' can be used to say. While Baz offers responses to some other important objections to his highly plastic non-representationalist conception of meaning in Chapter 6 (the 'Frege-Geach' problem for example), the problem of over-generation is not discussed in detail, and the idea that 'the history of a word…does not foreclose more or less creative uses' (p. 136) is in tension with the idea that speaking a language involves constraints on use. Any

convincing theory of linguistic meaning needs to account not only for the way language allows flexibility and novelty in expression, but also for the way it constrains what expressions can be used to say.

In the book's penultimate chapter (Ch. 6), Baz makes the case that some facts about the way competence with the word 'know' is acquired support the alternative conception of language over the representationalist conception. Baz focuses on the study of children's acquisition of mental state terms in Bartsch and Wellman (1995). While Bartsch and Wellman themselves assume a representationalist conception of language, according to which competence with 'know' involves applying it to cases of *knowledge*, Baz argues that the data Bartsch and Wellman collect about children's use of 'know' 'actually speak in favor of [the] alternative conception', according to which competence is not a matter of referring to the right worldly phenomenon, but using the word appropriately, where that is primarily a matter of mastering the role of 'know' in various social interactions (pp. 155–156).

Baz's discussion of data about language acquisition is a welcome addition to the debates about the meaning of 'know', especially his close attention to the background assumptions that may be influencing the interpretation of the reported data in these studies. There is room for expanding Baz's discussion of the relevance of linguistic acquisition for big picture debates about the nature of meaning, since a great deal of research on the development of mental state attribution has been conducted since Bartsch and Wellman (1995)—see the dozens of more recent studies discussed in Dudley (2018), for example.

Baz does philosophy a service by trying to identify the deeply held commitments that drive philosophical problems and querying whether those commitments are mandatory. While it's unlikely that this book will bring about a revolutionary change in philosophers' methods and assumptions, Baz presents some interesting anomalies for certain varieties of 'normal science' in contemporary philosophy.*

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