

25th Anniversary of Gareth Evans' Death: Introduction

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Gareth Evans died tragically young, age 34, in 1980. By that time he had already left a very impressive and influential body of papers. The publication of *The Varieties of Reference* in 1982, edited by John McDowell, helped to situate him amongst the most important philosopher of the second half of the twentieth century. According to Evans, his book is an examination of the role played by singular terms and other referential expressions within a semantic theory for natural languages. However, what that book achieves is of much greater importance. Following the path opened by some of his colleagues and teachers at Oxford (Michael Dummett, Peter Strawson, John McDowell), Evans presents a way to understand our relation to the world as thinkers, agents and subjects of experience in which concepts do not act as either causal or epistemic intermediaries, and situates on the basis of that understanding a distinction between the way the referential link behaves in language and in thought. This way, the antirepresentationalist schools of thought in the philosophy of mind and cognitive sciences inherit a theoretical framework that was not fully available before Evans' work. If it can be shown, on the one hand, that the existence of the objects they are about is a condition of possibility for some thoughts and, on the other, that those thoughts are somehow basic (in the sense of being a precondition for the existence of other thoughts), an important part of the explanation of the connection between thought and reality will be obtained. One of the fundamental aims of Evans' work is to establish the interdependence of thought and objectivity.

Evans is a difficult philosopher and, perhaps due to that, some time has been necessary for his ideas to reach the popularity they enjoy today in the philosophical arena. His proposals have an increasing echo on metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind and philosophy of language. This homage in the 25th anniversary of his death does not pretend to cover the unfortunate editorial vacuum regarding monographies dedicated to his philosophy, but rather to contribute modestly to the growing debate around his ideas.

Each of the four papers from this collection deals with a different topic within Evans' philosophy. Two of them center on Evans' posthumous book *The Varieties of Reference* (Beament, de Pinedo), while the other two discuss some of his equally influential papers. Evans' theory of perception, one of his main concerns, is discussed in two of the papers (de Gaynesford, Beament), while the other two tackle questions related to Evans' epistemology and metaphysics.

In his contribution to this volume, Manuel de Pinedo offers a reading of *The Varieties of Reference* that situates Evans' work in a central position within the evolution of philosophy since Descartes' times. The problem analysed is that concerning how thoughts and, more specifically, judgements, relate to objects in the world. For Descartes and the still very active contemporary Cartesian tradition, that relation exists in virtue of a factor extraneous to thought. The factor in question has been differently identified, depending on philosophical sensibilities varying with time, as a supernatural or a natural one. Pinedo argues that Evans, together with McDowell, has been the first to discover a way to understand the link between thought and world that does not isolate the former from the latter while avoiding Frege's Platonist dead-end which precludes this isolation situating thought outside the material world. Evans, on the other hand, claims that it is impossible to have a proper understanding of human thought and action if we do not give sufficient weight to the fact that the agent is part of the world. This first but fundamental insight combines ideas from Frege and Russell, a combination that Pinedo reconstruct by giving pride of place to McDowell's notion of *de re* sense. What that notion emphasizes is the Fregean doctrine that thoughts are constituted by senses, even though these are understood adverbially. In contrast, it is Russellian to make it a condition for the existence of the thoughts expressed by means of proper names and demonstrative expressions and the thoughts based on identification through recognition that their objects exist. This way, concludes Pinedo, Evans shows that meanings are not

in the head or detached from the world, but rather are, like the mind, part of the world.

Pinedo also highlights another aspect of Evans' contribution, one that, he argues, makes his work the main alternative to Cartesianism: his distinction between the conditions for saying something and the conditions for understanding something and, as a consequence, the separation between the philosophy of language and the philosophy of thought. Evans' neo-Fregeanism, with its demanding Russellian ingredients, opposes internalist conceptions of the mind—for which the components of thought supervene upon intrinsic properties of the mind, or the brain—but also opposes externalism—which defends the idea that mere causal relations between reality and subjects of thought, i.e., relations that are not integrated in the subjects' conceptual system, fix some of the constituents of their thoughts. The importance of Evans' ideas could not be greater.

One of Evans' major philosophical achievements is his groundbreaking account of demonstrative expressions and demonstrative modes of thinking within a Fregean framework. Evans distinguishes three kinds of demonstrative identification and claims that all three are to be understood differently from specificatory or descriptive types of identification. One can think demonstratively of an object if one possesses the ability to identify it either by means of perception, of memory *and* of a description uniquely true of the object. Tom Beament contends in his contribution to this volume Evans' thesis regarding the third type. The constraints on what sort of relation constitutes the thinker's ability to think demonstratively of an object, are too strong to be satisfied by means of a descriptive mode of identification. Evans attempts to show that there is a difference between identifying an object as "the ϕ " and as "that ϕ ". In both cases there is a definite description involved. However, in the former, but not in the latter, the mode of thinking is descriptive. The unsurmountable difficulty found by Beament is this: Evans holds a thesis according to which a theory of sense and a theory of understanding cannot be separated and, furthermore, Evans' account of demonstratives makes it necessary for the object thought about to exist in order for there to be any thought. Evans needs to appeal to a connection between the thinker and the object which is neither provided by the description used to identify it (which would make the thought descriptive and, hence, entertainable independently of the existence of the object), nor consists of a mere causal, informational, link with the object (which would violate the demand for meaning and understanding to remain tied, as the thinker need not have access to that causal connection).

A parallel difficulty emerges for demonstrative thoughts where the mode of identification is memory-based (i.e., based on a recognitional capacity). Recognitional capacities can be exercised even in the absence of the object they are supposed to identify. This is so given that they consist in the ability to recognize the object in terms of its appearance, an ability which can be exercised with objects other than the one they aim to identify. This form of identification need not be descriptive, but it is conceivable in the absence of an object. However, in this case Evans can appeal to the capacity of the subject to bring together knowledge of her egocentric placing within the environment and an objective spatio-temporal framework. This solution is not available for the case of descriptive identification of the object: knowledge of a fact that uniquely identifies an object is not something that can be cashed out in terms of keeping track of the object by bringing together a subject-center conception of space and an objective framework. Evans suggestion is that the non-descriptive constitutive element of description-based demonstrative thoughts is the intention of the subject to refer to the object from which the information is derived. However, Beament argues, such intentions cannot do the work: if the intention is singular, the subject should need to have a thought about the object (to intend to refer to it) previously to having the demonstrative thought, and we would have to expect the subject to master the technical notions involved in the explanation of informational links. If the intention is general, the distinction between demonstrative, but description-based, thoughts and descriptive thoughts collapses. Beament's final diagnosis is that we cannot fit the third kind of mode of identification within a Fregean account of demonstrative thought, we have to do with perception and memory.

Max de Gaynesford's paper takes issue with Evans' important discussion of the spatial and material conditions for the objectivity of thought. The paper offers supports for Evans' contention that objectivity requires thinking of things as constituted by space-occupying matter, but finds Evans' arguments against the less demanding condition imposed by Strawson—a spatial, or quasi-spatial framework is sufficient for objectivity—wanting. A different set of arguments against Strawson's position, compatible with Evans' endeavour, are offered in the paper. In doing so, the author shows, among other things, ways to generalize Strawson's theses regarding *our* conceptual scheme to *any* scheme that makes sense of the possibility of thinking about the objective world. Even though our author does not mention him explicitly, such a generalization is in line with the work of Donald Davidson and his rejection of the third dogma of empiricism.

This is not the only point where Davidson comes to mind. The paper manages to shed light on several crucial questions for Evans' philosophy, sometimes in passing. One of them is the idea that Strawson's criterion for objectivity allows for a phenomenalist reduction of thought, i.e., it makes phenomenism compatible with the demands of objectivity. De Gaynesford suggests, against Evans, that it could be compulsory to appeal to interpersonal agreement, to the possibility of communication, in order to exclude phenomenism. This would go directly against Evans' attempt at giving an account of thought that does not mention language. It is easy to recall here Davidson's insistence on the necessity of a public language for the objectivity of thought.

Evans work on the theory of meaning takes it that the meaning of a sentence is its truth-conditions. Furthermore, a theory of meaning for a language, according to Evans, should go beyond giving us the abstract semantic properties of the language. It should also disclose a structure within that language which mirrors the competence of the speakers. Given that the speakers are not expected to know a theory of meaning in order to be competent, their knowledge of the mirroring structure must be, at best, tacit. The idea of tacit knowledge is itself in need of elucidation. A variety of options regarding its nature emerge, even if we opt out of an explanation of it in terms of dispositions. In his paper, Darragh Byrne analyses Evans' account of tacit knowledge in terms of dispositions understood as categorical bases (non-dispositional-causal, probably neurological-properties that possibilitate the speakers to have the competence that they show in their linguistic behaviour), an account that tries to make sense of competence in terms that themselves are not behavioural (as it could be the case on a conditional account of dispositions). Byrne claims that many of the important results of Evans' theory of meaning could be retained even if we gave up the mentalistic overtones associated with his ideas about tacit knowledge. This modification to Evans' theory of meaning has an added advantage: it places it in line with Evans overall anti-mentalistic programme. Evans, in order to embrace a theory of tacit knowledge that involves appeal to notions that are not behavioural, distinguished within the states with representational content those with contents that are not propositional attitudes (hence, there is no commitment to a mentalistic theory of the latter). This is possible for him because he allows for non-conceptual content to be possessed by sub-doxastic states. However, the paper shows that no such commitment to non-conceptual content is needed in order to retain the demand that a theory of meaning must mirror linguistic competence.

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