Living Ontologists - Bibliographical Guide: A - B

These pages will give some essential bibliographical information about some of the most important living ontologists; only a few titles will be cited for every author.

- Liliana Albertazzi
- George Bealer
- Ermanno Bencivenga
- Jocelyn Benoist
- Mauricio Beuchot Puente
- Mario Bunge
- Panayot Butchvarov

George Bealer


"This is the only complete logic for properties, relations, and propositions (prps) that has been formulated to date. First, an intensional abstraction operation is adjoined to first-order quantifier logic. Then, a new algebraic semantic method is developed. The heuristic used is not that of possible worlds but rather that of prps taken at face value. Unlike the possible worlds approach to intensional logic, this approach yields a logic for intentional (psychological) matters, as well as modal matters. At the close of the paper, the origin of incompleteness in logic is investigated. The culprit is found to be the predication relation, a relation on properties and relations that is expressed in natural language by the copula."


"Presented here is an argument for the existence of universals. Like Church's translation-test argument, the argument turns on considerations from intensional logic. But whereas Church's argument turns on the fine-grained informational content of intensional sentences, this argument turns on the distinctive logical
features of 'that'-clauses embedded within modal contexts. And unlike Church's argument, this argument applies against truth-conditions nominalism and also against conceptualism and in re realism (the doctrine that universals are ontologically dependent upon the existence of instances). So if the argument is successful, it serves as a defense of full ante rem realism (the doctrine that universals exist independently of the existence of instances). The argument emphasizes the need for a unified treatment of intensional statements - modal statements as well as statements of assertion and belief. The larger philosophical moral will be that ante rem universals are uniquely suited to carry a certain kind of modal information. Linguistic entities, mind-dependent universals, and instance-dependent universals are incapable of serving that function.


"Recent work in philosophy of language has raised significant problems for the traditional theory of propositions, engendering serious skepticism about its general workability. These problems are, I believe, tied to fundamental misconceptions about how the theory should be developed. The goal of this paper is to show how to develop the traditional theory in a way which solves the problems and puts this skepticism to rest. The problems fall into two groups. The first has to do with reductionism, specifically, attempts to reduce propositions to extensional entities—either extensional functions or sets. The second group concerns problems of fine-grained content—both traditional "Cicero / Tully" puzzles and recent variations on them which confront scientific essentialism. After characterizing the problems, I outline a non-reductionist approach—the algebraic approach—which avoids the problems associated with reductionism. I then go on to show how the theory can incorporate non-Platonic (as well as Platonic) modes of presentation. When these are implemented nondescriptively, they yield the sort of fine-grained distinctions which have been eluding us. The paper closes by applying the theory to a cluster of remaining puzzles, including a pair of new puzzles facing scientific essentialism."


"Good evidence is clearly required for the sort of knowledge sought in science, logic, mathematics, and philosophy. This suggests the idea of approaching the a priori through the topic of "evidence" (or reasons). The paper begins with a discussion of our use of "intuitions" as evidence (reasons) in the a priori disciplines (logic, mathematics, philosophy) and an argument showing that omitting intuitions from one's body of evidence leads to epistemic self-defeat. This is followed by an explanation of why intuitions are evidence."


Ermanno Bencivenga


"The correspondence theory of truth provides standard semantics with a simple scheme for evaluating sentences. This scheme however depends on the existence of basic correspondences between singular terms and objects, and thus breaks down in the case of non-denoting singular terms. An alternative to the correspondence theory is thus called for in dealing with such terms. The author criticizes various positions
discussed in the literature in this regard, and then presents a solution of his own.


With Karel Lambert and Bas C. van Fraassen


"In this book, Bencivenga offers a stylistically and conceptually exciting investigation of the nature of language, mind, and personhood and the many ways the three connect. Bencivenga contests the basic assumptions of analytic (and also, to an extent, postmodern) approaches to these topics. His exploration leads through fascinating discussions of education, courage, pain, time and history, selfhood, subjectivity and objectivity, reality, facts, the empirical, power and transgression, silence, privacy and publicity, and play -- all themes that are shown to be integral to our thinking about language."


"There are two ways of conceiving the relation between language and the world: they differ by making opposite choices about which of them is to be assigned priority, and which is to be dependent on the other. The priority and dependence in question here are conceptual, not causal: at the causal level everyone agrees that certain portions of the nonlinguistic world (intelligent entities, say) must be in place before meaningful expressions come to pass, so what we are concerned with is how the notion of meaningful is to be understood - whether 'meaningful' is defined as something that means some portion of the world or rather as something that belongs to a self-sufficient structure of analogies and oppositions. For example, taking for granted that there would be no meaningful expression 'John' unless some intelligent entity came up with it, is 'John' a meaningful expression because there is a John that it means or rather because it is a certified component of the English language, categorized as a name and clearly distinct from 'Paul' - though somewhat analogous to 'Jack'? If you go the first route, I will say that you are a realist at the conceptual (or transcendental) level; if you go the second one, I will call you a conceptual (or transcendental) idealist. 'Realist' is a transparent term, since 'res' is `thing,' in Latin and clearly this kind of realist puts things (conceptually) first, considers them basic in her logical space; 'idealism' is more controversial, since the 'idea' in it recalls a psychologist jargon that is not as popular today as it once was, so one might think that some other root, more clearly expressive of the semantical, logico/linguistic character of the current analysis, should be preferred. And yet, once we are clear about its implications, 'idealism' remains a better choice because it lets us see the connections of this contemporary debate with other, classical ones; later I will explore some such connections. Before I do that, however, I have to explain what the contemporary debate looks like.

My example of a meaningful expression above was not chosen at random: in the case of names there is more agreement than with any other part of speech concerning what they mean. 'John' means a (male) human being, 'Lassie' means a dog, 'the Queen Mary' means a ship, and in general a name that means anything means an object - or, as People say, denotes it or refers to it (the terminology is highly unstable: 'reference' and 'denotation' are used as translations of the Fregean 'Bedeutung,' but 'meaning' is also used for the same purpose, consistently with Frege's own suggestion, and indeed it is the most natural English counterpart of this perfectly ordinary German word). There are complications here, since names may be ambiguous and the objects meant may be past or future as well as present ones, but none of that touches the essence of names' favored condition: what kind or category the meaning of a name belongs to is hardly ever an issue, much less so than, say, with predicates or connectives. Probably because of this (and of the great importance that concrete, middle-sized objects like human beings. dogs. and ships have in our form of life), it is around names that the realism/ idealism controversy has surfaced in the clearest form within contemporary logic. And free logics have been its most conspicuous outcome." pp. 293-294.

Jocelyn Benoist

Critique: 480-506.


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Mauricio Beuchot Puente


