Reason and Violence.

Review Author[s]:
    Peter Singer

Mind, New Series, Vol. 85, No. 340 (Oct., 1976), 632-634.

conditions of the sentences of a language must incorporate a recursive definition of truth in a model. For otherwise the truth conditions of a sentence would be unconnected with that part of its meaning which involved its logical relationships. This link between model theory and truth conditions brings out more of the philosophical interest of Montague Grammar.

It might also be said that Montague Grammar is philosophically significant because it studies meanings as set-theoretic entities called intensions. But in Montague Grammar, the intension of an expression is a function from possible worlds to possible extensions of that expression; and it can certainly be asked whether such a function is a meaning. On pages 43–44 Thomason rejects the idea that the meaning of 'the author of *Waverley*' could be its extension, arguing that a person may understand its meaning without knowing its extension. This is a good argument, since the meaning of an expression is surely what is known by someone who fully understands it. In view of this last point, however, it may be doubted that a person understands an expression just in case he knows its intension. This doubt may be supported by noting that, if meanings are identical with intensions, then any two logically equivalent sentences have the same meaning. Of course, this is not to deny that intensions are themselves philosophically interesting and important, nor even that they are intimately related to meanings.

Philosophers of language have learned much about meaning and truth from the great advances in logic initiated primarily by Frege. They can expect to learn even more as logical techniques continue to develop, and to be applied within linguistics to natural language. Obviously, they will be fully rewarded only if they understand the new discoveries; and to achieve that they can begin in no better way than by reading *Formal Philosophy*.

SUNDERLAND POLYTECHNIC   D. E. OVER

Reason and Violence. Edited by SHERMAN M. STANAGE. Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1974. Pp. xv+253. £5.

It is no longer unusual for philsosophers to write about contemporary social issues like war and famine, civil disobedience and abortion. On some of these issues, philosophers have made important contributions to public discussions; but on others they have found it harder to say anything very helpful or interesting. Violence, as a social issue, falls into the second category. Considering the nature of violence, this should come as no surprise. Philosophical techniques are useful when there is something to be argued about, and reasons for or against a course of action to be examined. The abortion debate, for instance, is well-suited to philosophic intervention, as several recent articles in the journals have shown. But there is little debate about the rights and wrongs of violence, in the way that there is a debate about the rights and wrongs of abortion.

Almost everyone agrees that violence is *prima facie* unjustifiable; and

almost everyone agrees that there are, nevertheless, circumstances in which violence may be used, for instance, to prevent greater violence. The precise circumstances in which violence is legitimate are too complex to be a ready subject for armchair discussion. In addition, much of the violence that causes the greatest public concern—criminal violence—does not seek moral or even rational justification.

In his preface to *Reason and Violence*, Sherman Stanage wonders why so few philosophers have directed their attention toward violence. When we consider the nature of the issue, however, we may find this less puzzling; and when, after reading the essays that follow Stanage's preface, we ask how enlightening these philosophical approaches to violence have been, we will probably feel that we understand why most philosophers have little to say on this topic.

One or two of the essays in *Reason and Violence* make quite interesting reading, though they are literary rather than philosophical. Two other essays really are serious attempts to discuss philosophical issues about violence. The remainder, however, are largely pretentious verbiage, apparent profundities scattered with quotations that do not even make clear the nature of the problem to which they are addressed. Rubinoff, taking as his starting point 'the crisis of modernity' manages to quote from Hobbes, Russell, Collingwood, R. D. Laing, Lewis Mumford, Goethe, Freud, Darwin, Sartre, Erich Fromm, Plato, George Orwell, Bertrand de Jouvenal, Denis de Rougemont, Milton, Pascal and the Bible before he concludes that only 'the purifying reflection of phenomenology' can restore the dignity of man. I found it difficult to retain any unified impression of the essay, other than that the author had read a lot of books. Nor did I learn much more from the essays by Gotesky and Girvetz, while John O'Neill's championing of Jerry Rubin's hippie 'anti-politics' already seems badly dated.

The exceptions to this level of discussion are the essays by Robert Audi and Timothy Binkley. These are modest contributions, and their conclusions are not startling, but they are reached by argument, not assertion. Audi, after establishing some defining features of violence, seeks to show that no general prohibition on violence will work, because particular situations are too complicated to be subsumed under such principles. In this I believe Audi is successful.

Binkley sets himself the more difficult task of arguing that most acts of force cannot be justified in terms of a theory of moral justification that uses an 'ideal consensus' of the opinion of impartial and clear-headed people, as the test of the rightness of an act. Frankena is Binkley's main target here, though there are many related theories.

Binkley's argument, though complicated by some unnecessary formalization, is basically simple: force can only be justifiable if it is necessary; if the intended victim would do willingly what he was going to be forced to do, force is unnecessary; therefore if the only justifiable acts of force are those that everyone, when clear-headedly and impartially viewing the facts, would agree to (the ideal consensus) there are no justifiable acts of force.

Of course, as Binkley himself points out, the argument applies only

to prospective justification; we can still hold that past acts of force are justifiable, since such acts may have been against people who would not willingly have done what they were forced to do, although had they been impartial and clear-headed, they would have. But the same can be true of the future too, and here lies the flaw in the argument. In real life, there are always going to be people who are neither clear-headed nor impartial, and it is quite possible that acts of force against them will be both necessary and justifiable, even by the test of the 'ideal consensus'. The ideal consensus, after all, is only an ideal, and Binkley's attempt to draw real-life implications from it cannot succeed.

The fact that, with the exception of the essays by Audi and Binkley, this book fails to come to grips with serious philosophical problems is no doubt due not only to the inherent difficulty of the subject, but also to the editor's peculiar conception of it. In his own contribution, Stanage tells us that he regards the 'fundamental *philosophical problems* in discussing violence' (his italics) as those of 'situating violence, of describing and analysing its structure or structures, of clarifying the ways in which it is structured, of articulating its modes and themes, and of showing how various kinds of violence may be related.' I find this strange, first because it omits all mention of the moral problem of the justifiability of violence, and second because I do not see what is philosophical about 'situating violence' or 'describing its structure or structures'. Indeed, I am not even sure what these phrases mean. To situate violence is, he tells us, to give it a 'site, a place or location', but presumably Stanage uses these terms in some unexplained metaphorical sense, since the problem of finding the location of violence is surely one for the police or army rather than the philosopher. Similarly, if the philosopher is going to describe the structure of violence, it must be in some very abstract sense, since otherwise almost every act of violence would have a different structure.

Finally, I cannot forebear mentioning one of the most extraordinary features of the whole book, which is to be found in Stanage's essay. One page of this essay is taken up with a list of English verbs, matched by what Stanage calls their 'violative modes'. The list begins like this:

Abuse	Abusives
Break	Breakives
Cease	Ceaseives

and continues all the way down to

Wound	Woundives

Perhaps there is some point that I have missed here, but I really cannot see how adding 'ives' to a string of verbs advances our philosophical understanding of anything.

The book has a useful bibliography.

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY   PETER SINGER