

The Style of Philosophy: An Obituary for Eva Picardi

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On Sunday afternoon, April 23, 2017, Eva Picardi died after a long illness. Eva had been Professor of Philosophy of Language at the University of Bologna for forty years. She belonged to a small group of Italians of her generation who did not just study and discuss contemporary analytic philosophy but was herself an active member of that larger philosophical community.

Eva had style—philosophical and personal. She mastered her field and had knowledge beyond it. Eva was no sceptic, and had firm philosophical certainties—she was a Fregean and worked on anything that is problematic in Frege’s philosophy of language and its aftermath. In discussion, she was precise and insightful. At the same time, often she did not argue the last steps: references and quotations insinuated a different ground and the unfinished argument left open the conclusion. It was lightness and respect, and more. She was as convinced that matters can be seen more than one way, which is what rewards us in a vast knowledge of the literature. A perspicuous picture, which is what we correctly aim at, is one that looks at its object from each of the surrounding points for an indefinite span of time, i.e. an impossible picture. That is no cause for regret—the world and life are richer than any pictures of them. We rather make maps, which takes notice of the asperities on the grounds, of the traffic there, of where we get supplies, with occasional glosses of phantasies we can make in traveling there. The maps help us explore spaces and habits that change through time more or less dramatically, requiring us to update them continuously.

A great teacher, Eva motivated and directed her students, a professional undertaking to which she dedicated time and energy, organizing seminars and students' presentations lasting a few whole days, during which she publicly discussed arguments almost line by line. At least ten of her students have become researchers and professors in Italy (Bologna, Pavia, two in Milan), other European countries (Birmingham, Helsinki, Lisbon), New Zealand (Auckland), US (Irvine, Northwestern University). As a member of several editorial boards, she acted as a referee, also for *Argumenta*, till the last months of her life, as she did working with Carlo Penco at a new translation into Italian of Frege's works.

Besides Frege—whose views of assertion were the topic of her doctoral work at Oxford, with Michael Dummett as supervisor—Wittgenstein was her author, whom too she studied and examined in depth. But Eva considered ideas of many other contemporary analytic philosophers: early classics, especially Russell and Ramsey, then Quine, Davidson, and more occasionally Brandom, and many of her generation or younger like Putnam, Travis, Soames, Lepore. As well she studied nineteenth-century logicians, and examined differently oriented philosophers like Peirce, Husserl, Gadamer, etc. I have met three philosophers with a full knowledge of their field, its whole literature and with a precise memory of their readings, which they could quote by heart—Eva was one of the three. Like the other two, she knew much more than her philosophical province and was curious about science, literature, music too.

Just as I cannot list the authors Eva studied in the course of ninety papers and four books, I cannot enumerate the topics she took up. Together with Annalisa Coliva, she edited a book of essays on Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein Today* (2004). Her papers are about topics such as vacuous names, radical interpretation, truth theories, compositionality, meaning and rules, belief and rationality, first-person authority, naturalism, sensory evidence, reference, normativity and meaning, grasping thoughts, concept and inference, literal meaning, multiple propositions, and identity. Eva's main contributions were the books *Assertibility and Truth. A Study of Fregean Themes* (1981), on the same topic as her Oxford D.Phil., and *La chimica dei concetti* (1994), which collected, in revised form, some of her essays on logic and psychologism, Frege and Kerry, Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein and Ramsey. She also published two introductions to the philosophy of language, *Linguaggio e analisi filosofica* (1992), *Le teorie del significato* (1999).

Among the many pieces, some are very brilliant, such as the "First Person Authority and Radical Interpretation" (1993), which criticizes Davidson's understanding of belief. With style, as if were an euphemism, and referring back to Frege's semantics, she entitled her essay on expressive content *Colouring*. All the papers she collected in *La chimica dei concetti* (*The Chemistry of Concepts*) are excellent. The title essay—whose ancestor, like those of other three papers there, was originally published in English with the same title—is about Frege's use of the metaphor of unsaturatedness, in close comparison with Peirce's use of it. The first essay in the collection, which too had an English ancestor, "The Logic of Frege's Contemporaries" (1987), maps late nineteenth-century German logicians, philosophers and psychologists, well- and less-well-known, whom Frege quoted or who quoted him, who in the then-dominant psychologistic approach to logic had ideas similar to some of Frege's. Sometimes the hints are captivating, as when Eva writes that to grasp what Lotze or Helmholtz meant respectively by *Lokalzeichen* (local sign) and by *Zeichen* (sign) "we have to look at their discussions of visual and spatial perception" (1987: 176). If Frege viewed lan-

guage as capable of overcoming the psychological conditioning of linguistic symbols making conceptual thinking possible (see 1987: 184), he, comments Eva, could not dismiss the fact that grasping thoughts, judging and presenting them as holding good “are mental acts occurring in time and performed by actual people” (1987: 186). That is, he could not dismiss understanding. (One of many her critical remarks of Frege’s work.) The paper shows the vast knowledge Eva had of the history of logic in the years that Frege was at work. The essay discusses Frege and Husserl, Frege and Erdmann, rebuts the idea that Frege was a Kantian, analyses the convergences between Sigwart and Frege and of those between Wundt and Frege. For instance, she relates Wundt’s view of judgment as a whole from which concepts are extracted to Frege’s idea that concepts occur instantiated and “concept words are extracted from the complete sentences in which they occur” (1987: 193).

The paper on “Sense and Meaning” (which is a more faithful translation of the German *Sinn und Bedeutung*) is a reconstruction of the two notions of Frege’s philosophy of language from 1879 until his last writings. Eva lists some problems of the distinction which she nevertheless endorses: (a) it is difficult to keep sense apart from meaning in the case of many expressions, such as connectives, prepositions, features, and numerals. (b) Linguistic signs are not signs of something, but *conventional* signs. Just how linguistic conventions work is, she stresses, a source of many misconceptions. (c) The context principle and the compositionality principle act differently for senses and for meanings: the sense of a complex expression composes the senses of the component expressions, the meaning of a complex expression, on the other hand, is a function of the meanings of simpler ones. (d) The assimilation of sentences to proper names—proper names of the True or of the False—deprives sentences of their central role in the context principle. (e) What do we learn when we come to know that an identity statement of the form $a=b$, which is not a priori, is true? Do we learn something about the signs, their sense or the object they mean? Eva answers the question by observing that the different senses of the names and the descriptions occurring in the identity judgment account for its informative value and are not what the identity judgment is about.

“Wittgenstein and Frege on Proper Names and the Context Principle” (2010), which had a German ancestor that Eva published in 2009 in *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, is first a comparison between Frege’s *Grundlagen* on the context principle and Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* views on sense and meaning, then a comparison between Frege’s *Grundlagen* on the context principle and Wittgenstein’s *Investigations* language-game. The last section of the essay defends a Fregean Wittgenstein on proper names against Kripke’s criticism. The *Investigation*’s view of proper names is not antagonistic to Frege’s. Vacuous names, such as *Nothing*, proper names of ordinary people, like *N.N.*, proper names of famous persons like *Moses* are discussed in the book, and the focus is how we understand these proper names, a very Fregean theme. The concept of a proper name is a family resemblance concept, writes Eva, an idea that finds support in Peter Geach, who in Geach 1969 argues that a proper name cannot be tied to just one definite description (cf. Picardi 2010: 181-82) In Frege’s footnote on the name *Aristotle* (in “On Sense and Meaning”) or in his remarks on the name *Gustav Lauben* (in “The Thought”) “what matters are the (fluctuating) pieces of information that can help speaker and hearer to find out whom they are talking about [...] by using the same proper name” (Picardi 2010: 182). As in the case of

Moses, which is a name one uses without defining it by a fixed definite description. A case which is very similar to that of *Gustav Lauben* in Frege's "The Thought". The paper, as is typical of Eva, offers a classic point of view for contemporary disputes, here those of Charles Travis, François Recanati, Ernie Lepore and Herman Cappelen.

The precision and the care in reconstructing Frege and updating his philosophy of language came out, in 2002, when Saul Kripke spent just over a month lecturing in Bologna on Frege on sense and reference. Traces of their discussion, which went on even after class, can be gleaned from Saul's acknowledgments in the footnotes of Kripke 2008.

Eva's impact on the Italian philosophical scene was also due to her work as a translator and editor, and as President of the Italian Society for Analytic Philosophy 2000-2002. She translated into Italian and edited *The Posthumous Works* by Gottlob Frege; *Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* and *Essays on Actions and Events* by Donald Davidson; *Origins of Analytic Philosophy*, *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics*, *Thought and Reality* and *The Nature and Future of Philosophy* by Michael Dummett. Besides, she edited the Italian editions of *Thought and Reality* by Michael Dummett and of *The Threefold Cord. Mind, Body, and World* by Hilary Putnam. She translated into Italian *Wittgenstein's Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics, Cambridge 1939*. With Carlo Penco she edited a collection of philosophical essays written by Frege between 1891 and 1897, including the three classic 1891-1892 papers. Besides, together with Joachim Schulte, she edited the German edition of *Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* by Donald Davidson.

During her long illness, she neither hid her condition nor turned it into a problem to share, going on as if there were no deadlines, undertaking various new projects. Just a few weeks ago, she was still making plans for Summer 2017. Elegant and beautiful, intelligent and cultivated, fearless.

If you want to see Eva's serious irony, have a look at this video:

<https://vimeo.com/108575306> (at 44 min, 11 sec; and 1 h, 19 min, 37 sec).

If you want to listen to a lecture by Eva, look this other video:

<http://www.cattedrarosmini.org/site/view/view.php?cmd=view&id=213&menu1=m2&menu2=m37&menu3=m410&videoid=935>

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