

REVIEW

RESENSIE

Colin Yallop reviews *Beyond expression: a systematic study of the foundations of linguistics* by Albert Weideman (2009, Paideia Press, Grand Rapids, MI ISBN 978-0-88815-204-6 xi + 236 pages)

This impressive text takes a broad sweep across philosophical linguistics, yet at the same time engages with fundamental issues of theorising about language. Faithful to its subtitle, it is a revised version of a dissertation submitted in 1981 as *Systematic concepts in linguistics*. The dissertation has been only lightly edited, as Weideman himself makes clear, but its purpose remains highly relevant, and I know of nothing to rival its penetrating critique of linguistics and its exploration of the application to linguistics of Dutch philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd's *wijsbegeerte der wetsidee* (usually known in English, somewhat ponderously, as 'the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea'). The book should appeal to readers with an interest in linguistic theory or the philosophy of language, and more generally to those engaged in applied or theoretical linguistics who wonder about the merits of structuralist and (post-)Chomskyan perspectives on language.

Weideman does assume some familiarity with Dooyeweerd's work, and readers who feel cautious about a book that unhesitatingly introduces 'reformational philosophy' (p.x) and a 'transcendental-empirical' method (p.6) may like to turn first to the Epilogue, which was written for this edition. As a kind of apologia for the book, it is a model of academic honesty and modesty. The brief final chapter (16, A linguistic alternative) could also be read before the rest of the book: it begins with the question: 'What are the prospects for a responsible linguistic approach that does not wish to travel the academic road of either structuralism or generativism?' Surely every linguist should be willing to consider that question.

The book is worth reading for its evaluation of Chomsky alone. While Chomsky's ideas about language neither remain exactly as they were in the early 1980s, nor have quite the same dominant position, their influence is still strong, not only in linguistics but also in fields such as cognitive psychology and speech and language technology.

The very first sentence of the book is a vigorous claim about objectivity: 'One of the die-hard myths of modern thought is the so-called neutrality or objectivity of our subjective theorizing.' Weideman then moves quickly into the relationship between philosophy and other fields of study (Chapter 1, Philosophy and the special sciences).

In Chapter 2 (Developing a linguistic methodology), Weideman manages to combine insights from Dooyeweerd and his successors with an evaluation of Chomsky's theoretical bases. Given Chomsky's appeal to Descartes and his use of the term 'Cartesian linguistics', it is of particular interest that Weideman raises questions about connections between Chomsky's ideas and those of Kant and Carnap.

Chapter 3 (Sample of a previous attempt) studies the work of Pieter Verburg, who held a chair at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands from 1957 to 1975. Several of Verburg's

publications discuss linguistics in the light of the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea, and this chapter is both a tribute to and a critique of Verburg's work.

The next eleven chapters follow Dooyeweerdian themes, with titles as follows:

- 4 Material lingual spheres
- 5 The expressive character of language
- 6 The elementary linguistic concept of lingual unity and multiplicity
- 7 Spatial analogies in the lingual aspect
- 8 Lingual constancy as an elementary linguistic concept
- 9 The operation of lingual norms in factual lingual processes
- 10 Lingual development and organization
- 11 Lingual volition and sensitivity
- 12 Lingual identification and distinction
- 13 Formative retrocipations in the lingual aspect
- 14 Discourse, text and other social anticipations

Several of these titles – and the content they announce – presuppose an understanding of the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea, but Weideman's writing, though occasionally technical, is never dry or esoteric. Within this Dooyeweerdian framework, Weideman is able to work his way through a wide range of important topics. Thus, Chapter 10 contains sections on 'Language and biology' and 'Normative lingual development', and in Chapter 12 there are sections on 'Language and thought' and 'Language and logic'.

The penultimate chapter (15) is new, the only substantial addition to the dissertation other than the Epilogue. With a title again redolent of the philosophy of the cosmonomic idea (The idea of lingual economy), it deals mainly with the organisation of conversation.

In short, this book admirably combines conciseness and comprehensiveness. There is no index, but chapters are relatively short and have plenty of subheadings, so navigating the book is not hard. There is a substantial list of references (pp. 230-35): works cited include some added as part of the revision, but there still are a few from later than the mid-1980s.

Finally, to illustrate the thought-provoking character of this book, I note Weideman's reference (pp.12-13) to a remark by Greimas suggesting that North American scholarship tends to an individualist perspective, in contrast to the more social or collective perspectives of Europe. Having read that, I found myself reflecting on what might be considered characteristics of North American, or perhaps more widely Anglo-Saxon, society: things such as a high view of individual autonomy, or a relatively utilitarian approach to education, or a legal system in which two sides compete vigorously for their version of the truth. Of course offhand observations such as these are simplistic, but they invite clarification and investigation – whether to refute or refine them. Perhaps the greatest value of Weideman's book is just that invitation to investigate, systematically and analytically. Weideman challenges us not only to think about language and linguistics but also to examine and understand foundations in general: the theories that underlie our academic work, the assumptions upon which our enterprises and institutions are built, the ideologies that implicitly justify our individual and social behaviour.

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